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The Door that has No Key

Duke's Son

The Blindness of Virtue

The Miracle of Love

THE MIRACLE OF LOVE

COSMO HAMILTON

THE MIRACLE OF LOVE

BY

COSMO HAMILTON

Author of "The Door That Has No Key,"
"The Blindness of Virtue," etc., etc.

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"What are you reading?"

"A love story."

"Is it good?"

"All love stories are good."

"Does it end happily?"

"All love stories end happily."

"Then it's a fairy tale?"

"Why, of course!"

TO
MY WIFE

(Who Believes in Fairies)

THE MIRACLE OF LOVE

THE MIRACLE OF LOVE

PART I

CLIVE HURBERT looked up suddenly, as though someone had called him. He met the great grey eyes of a girl he had never seen before. And from that moment he knew, as though it were written, that the boat for Calais would go without him in the morning.

A moment before he had been sitting alone in the big, dull, old-fashioned dining-room of the Lord Warden Hotel, Dover. He had been led by the head waiter, whose appearance was that of a stage bishop, but whose accent was ripely Irish, to a small table at the end of the room, an arm's-length from a pompous fireplace of red and black marble. He would have been depressed at the sight of all those empty tables and the listless white-shirt-fronted men who, yawning openly, arranged and arranged again the knives and forks and their vases of tired flowers, if his blood had not tingled with the exhilaration of youth and all his senses had not been alive to the glorious fact that he was escaping, that he was setting out as a wanderer, a detached man, with all the best of life in front of him, to find what lay beyond the horizon over which he had hitherto only been permitted to fling his imagination. Like a swallow that settles for an hour on the endless telephone wire that lines the long road, before flying south, this man, this young, spoiled man, the son of a Duke who had died before the grim hand of democracy had taken a firm grip upon British

institutions and society, had realized the falsity of his position, and finding himself totally unconnected with any of the things that hold most men to their surroundings, had set out alone to discover the world, to dally in foreign cities, watch the ways and manners of new peoples, and go, not like a bee gathering honey for the hive, but like a wasp that eats as he goes.

And there he was, in this empty, dull, out-of-date hotel, impatiently killing the hours that lay between him and the morning, boyishly eager to find himself on the deck of the boat that would quickly leave behind her the white cliffs of the land with which he was out of sympathy.

He was twenty-five. He had been educated at Eton, where all the snobs among masters and boys had toadied to him because he was a Duke's son, and at Oxford, where arm-chair Socialism had proved to him the paradox of his position in the world. He was Lord Clive Hurbert, the bearer of a courtesy title, the mere brother of a man who had unwillingly succeeded to the oldest and most honoured and the poorest English dukedom. He had just enough money to prevent him from earning a living by the sweat of his brow and far too little to enable him to take the place in his own set that convention and old-established precedent demanded. If he was not fish or flesh, he was, at any rate, good red-herring, and he realized, with a sense of whimsical irony, and sentimental cynicism, that he really had no right, as things were, to be alive. He knew that he was, in fact, a relic of what are called the good old days, that he stood towards other men in relation to the march of events much as a charming piece of Charles II. filigree silver stands among the ordinary modern metal of everyday use. On his leisurely, half-critical, half-amused way through life he had felt rather like a piece of rare bric-à-brac, an *objet d'art,* an inimitable relic, valuable no longer

in his own country which had outgrown her subjection to the great families, purchasable only by some over-rich member of a nation tired of democracy. As a second son he was of no account in his family. He was utterly devoid of that sort of ambition that urges a man to live laborious days, and it was *esprit de corps* alone that prevented him from entering politics, because all his sympathies were democratic. A sense of humour, perhaps a little too keen, showed him the absurdity of Lord Clive Hurbert as a socialist, and so having no duties, no responsibilities to any other man than his valet, and no other ties to home except those of a deep affection for his people, he had dropped his title—he almost wished he could have dropped his breeding with it, and his unmistakable cut and undisguisable air—and telling himself, with the perfect confidence of youth, that he was the master of his fate, the captain of his soul, was on the wing, caring little where he alighted or how long he stayed away.

And it was at the moment when he was most exultant at his complete freedom, most confident that, perhaps alone among men, he stood in the world completely and wonderfully detached, with comparatively a few hours only before him to wait for the little boat that would put the Channel between him and the country in which he was a Gilbertian figure, that all his plans tumbled into chaos at the first sight of the girl whose sudden appearance in that dull room had been like sunlight in a tunnel.

Providence, like a good mother, has a watchful eye for all her children, and at the moment when the most cunning of them has a hand on the handle of the door that leads to irresponsibility, she gives a quiet call and brings him back.

For a long moment Clive and this girl were held by each other's eyes. Without self-consciousness, with-

out the slightest uneasiness, they remained, arrested as though in mid-air, and looked at each other like two children recognizing a sudden friendship. It was only when a waiter brought the menu and stood between them that Clive drew a long, deep breath and asked himself what had happened. His heart was beating violently as though he had been running. His blood seemed to be whirling through his veins with the speed of a mill-stream. An unseen hand seemed to have waved a wand and transformed the dingy dining-room into an orchard aflame with blossoms. A finger might have touched some wonderful instrument and sent a bell-like, thrilling, electrical note throbbing and echoing all through the world. If he had not been an Englishman, stuccoed over with the hard plaster of good form, he would have got up and gone to the table where this girl sat, and said some such perfectly natural things as: "May I sit here and talk to you? We are ships that pass in the night. Let us slow down and throw out signals." If he had allowed himself to be carried away by his first overwhelming impulse, he would have crossed to her and said: "I *must* speak to you. I *must*. If we never meet again after to-night we are twin spirits, that leap to each other."

As it was, he remained in his seat, made a mere pretence of eating, and let his eyes feast on the girl's small, fair head, her sweet, oval face, her red mouth on which a smile seemed to be a stranger, her round, white neck and her lovely, fastidious hands. He told himself that she was unbelievable, exquisite, all his dreams come true. With a sort of boyish wonder and delight he recognized in her the very epitome of his desire. He almost laughed as he felt himself dive head-first into love. All the youthful cynicisms that he had carefully worded as to the utter impossibility of love at first sight returned like homing pigeons and fluttered about him ashamed. This

was love at first sight. It didn't matter who she was, what she was, or whence she came; he loved her. Without knowing her name even he was ready to lead her away, then and there, almost without a word—if only she would go—and make her his wife. And if he never saw her again during all the rest of the life that God had intended him to live, he knew—yes, he knew—that he would leave that hotel a widower, a man whose heart had been given utterly away, for good and all.

Every thought and place that had been in his head when he entered the hotel to wait impatiently till the morning had been driven before this divine, miraculous, mystifying sensation. The morning? What morning? The boat to Calais? Why? How could he put the Channel between himself and the girl who held his life in the soft palm of her little hand? . . . He sat in that unromantic room from which he could see the hall with the arm-chairs, red-leather covered, mapped round large squares of Turkey carpets in prosaic patterns, its conventional fireplace with brass-headed dogs and imitation Dutch tiles, its shaded clusters of electric lights, its coloured photographs of London and Riviera hotels, framed in gold, and its innumerable small oak tables with green tiled tops and brass ash-trays, and looked and looked. Tall and slight and thoroughbred, his sun-tanned face clean shaven, his dark, thick, smooth hair all scrupulously brushed back from his wide forehead, his eyes straight and steady, he seemed, in his dinner clothes, to be as unromantic as his surroundings. And yet, with all the paradox that was peculiar to him, the blood in his veins had turned suddenly into that full red fluid that had swept his ancestors into wars and tourneys, raids and captures, and made them eager to risk life, honour and estates in the service of a woman.

And then he forgot about being English, remembered only that he was a man in love, left his table, strode

across the room, under the astonished eyes of the waiters, and halted in front of the girl. It had come to him suddenly that at any moment she might get up and go and that he might never be able to find her again.

"I want to speak to you most awfully," he said. "May I?"

She looked up gravely. She was two or three years younger than Clive, but for some reason the expression in her eyes made her seem older. She said: "Yes, please do."

He sat down at her table and pushed the vase of tired flowers aside. They were badly in the way of her face.

"Would you mind if I tell my waiter to bring my dinner here?"

"No, I wish he would."

Clive held up a finger. The man came over and smiled broadly as he went off to carry out the order.

The two faced each other frankly, gladly and without the slightest touch of awkwardness. To Clive, at any rate, his place was there.

And as the girl looked into his eyes, and saw what was in them, she involuntarily slipped a plain gold ring from a finger of her left hand and thrust it into her little gold mesh bag.

They sat over the table for a long time, talking. Neither of them had eyes for the waiter who, with deliberate unsubtlety, threw out a series of unmistakable hints that he desired to see the last of them. The electric light at the other end of the room was switched off. The head waiter sat down behind a screen, and with an unlighted cigarette in his mouth, read the latest news in the evening paper. In the street, outside a fisherman's inn, the inevitable sea-coast itinerant musicians were playing merry tunes on the violin and harp with the usual melancholy result. And in a room near by the

nagging noise of a typewriter, worked with a touch of temper, came to Clive's ears subconsciously.

And all the while Clive talked like a boy to someone whom he had known all his life. The quiet, rather elaborately-phrased way in which he usually spoke disappeared. There was no longer any of the young-man cynicism in the things he said. He was utterly natural and simple, and curiously naïve. For a little while the inexplicable expression of sadness that had stamped itself on the girl's mouth remained. Gradually, as Clive passed from subject to subject, flipping them all with light-hearted wit, a smile came, and finally a laugh. Having won these, to his infinite satisfaction—he was puzzled, annoyed and affronted that anything in life should have dared to bring sadness into hers—he redoubled his efforts so that he might see her face light up and the constant gleam of her teeth.

What made this unconventional conversation seem perfectly ordinary and right, and gave it an added touch of boy-and-girlness, was that all the talk was impersonal —all the actual talk. But all the while the girl could read whole sentences in Clive's eyes that made her breath come fast.

Finally an impatient hand thrust a small plate on the table at Clive's elbow. The bill for dinner, folded back, was lying upon it and the outraged waiter remained. Clive looked up. The presence of a third person came with a sort of shock. The man's face was eloquent. "I'm sorry," Clive said. "I'm afraid we've kept you about." He signed the bill and gave the man a substantial tip and rose. The girl had already risen, startled to find the rest of the gloomy room in half-darkness. She made no effort to see the name Clive signed. He was a man she must never see again after that night. She preferred to think of him as "he," he who had come so unexpectedly into her prison-like life bringing with him

just that wonderful note of possession, of virile ownership, of unquestioning love, of which she had dreamed since the idea of man had slipped unnoticed into her young thoughts.

She gave a little smile of thanks and apology to the already appeased waiter, and went out into the hall. Clive followed her quietly. Her slimness, the straightness of her back, the easy swing of her walk, the unconscious autocracy of the tilt of her chin bewitched him anew. How altogether thoroughbred she was! How exquisitely she walked in beauty!

She waited for him to join her. There was a look of pride in her eyes as she watched him stride quietly across the hall. It seemed so natural and right that he should come and stand by her—wonderful and almost unbelievable too, because of all the men she had met since she had been in society he was the one man. The pity of it was that he had come too late.

"Don't let's sit down in this fuggy old hall," he said. "What do you say to going out on the cliffs where there's air and the moon to see?"

She smiled and nodded. This boy—he was delightfully a boy—asked questions and gave orders in the same breath. "Shall I get a hat?"

"Oh, no! Why? It's a fine night and I want to see your hair in the moonlight." He touched her elbow with his fingers, with the slightest show of impatience and eagerness.

And so she crossed the hall to the main entrance of the hotel and went down the wide steps intc the almost deserted street. Outside the narrow door of the fisherman's inn, the so-called musicians were struggling with "Un Peu d'Amour." The air made the girl's eyelids flick. A little love! Here was a big, urgent, overwhelming, obviously first love and she could not accept it—she who needed it so much.

He fell into step with her. "It's altogether amazing to have met you like this," he said. "I had planned to cross to-morrow morning and then go wandering whichever way the wind blew."

"Won't you?"

"What—now? Rather not! I've turned a mental somersault, a complete right-about face. Where are you going?"

The girl was going to say "Home," but she changed the word to "London."

"Where are you staying?"

She hesitated. What, after all, was the good of not telling him the truth? He deserved it and he must know sooner or later. "Harwich House," she said.

He gave her a sharp look. "You're not going to stay under the roof of that man Harwich, are you?"

Her chin went up involuntarily. "Why not?"

"I beg your pardon. Naturally you're not that . . . *his* friend. You're hers, of course—that poor, wretched girl, whose father and mother sacrificed her."

"Is that what people say?"

"Yes. Isn't it true?"

"As true as death, which is the only thing that can give her freedom."

There was a soft breeze off the sea. It puffed into their faces as they came out on the cliffs. A full moon hung in a clear sky and all the stars sparkled. A fishing-smack flitted through the silver road in the water like a moth in the candle-light.

Clive turned suddenly and halted in front of the girl. "I'll take you to London," he said, "if you will let me. But don't go to-morrow. Stay on here. Let's stay on here in this benighted place and make it a sort of temporary oasis. We're at the end of things on one side—the very edge of England. And on the other there's the old world that's become so utterly full of new meaning.

Let's rest here for a few days between tides, before we are carried back on the one that moves on London. Will you? Can you?"

There was the white light of the moon on his face, but the beacons in his eyes blazed. She stood and looked at them for a moment. Everything in her—spirit, soul, heart and brain—answered to this impetuous, unpractical, autocratic, clean-limbed boy. Just as he had recognized in her the woman whom it was his right to marry and to love, she had recognized in him the one man on all this conglomerate earth into whose arms she had the right and the desire to go. Why shouldn't she have a few days of stolen happiness before she went back to her prison? Why shouldn't she snatch and enjoy this little interlude that would become her most precious memory? What harm could be done if she refused to remember who she was and the vows she had taken for a few golden hours? If she said "No," and went by the train that she had chosen in the morning, holding up the truth before his eyes like a notice to trespassers, she might never meet him again.

So she said: "Yes, I can and will."

They sat down on the sun-dried turf on top of the cliffs. The wash of the sea drawing the shingle back with it made a sort of incessant lullaby. It was a night for love and inarticulate whisperings and the clasping of hands. But the girl looked all about at the wonder and beauty of it, and not for the first time she was struck with the utter indifference of nature towards humanity and how both go their appointed ways in total disregard of each other—not with antagonism, except as to the man who actually handles earth and draws his daily bread from her very bosom, but with the sort of absence of interest that exists between next-door neighbours who do not desire to speak. A man may leave a

room in which his best beloved is lying dead and come out on a day all rosy with the rising sun. He may lie in the soft arms of the woman without whom the world is empty and know the greatest happiness that life can give, while a cruel storm strips trees of their branches and lays the harvest in chaos.

Clive stretched his long length out, leaned on his elbows and watched the girl, who sat nursing her knees. A sort of jealousy, a sort of envy, crept into her heart as she saw how splendidly free from care and the ties of life he was. The fact that he was his own master to go and do precisely what he wished at any time, to alter plans on the spur of the moment, to turn round and go back at the very last instant, made her draw comparisons. Life had never appeared to be so hideously unfair. She, too, ought to be unfettered, unbound. Her fingers touched her little bag and a shiver ran through her as they came in contact with the ring that placed a barrier between herself and this boy, and bound her to another man. Like all women who have come up against disillusions early in life, she caught herself wondering whether this apparently easy-going man took himself and her and love quite seriously enough. He had asked her for a few days. What did he mean to do at the end of them? What did he imagine that he and she were going to make of them while they lasted? His *naïveté* was genuine. His honesty without question. And if eyes were indeed the index of the soul, his was clean and good. But here she was, deliberately and with a desperate effort to clutch at temporary happiness, placing herself in a compromising position. She had heard people talk of romance as though it were the peculiar property of novelists and men who wrote for the stage. Her father scoffed at the mere mention of the word, and associated it with neuroticism and hysteria and long hair. Even her mother, who did not go through life

with her eyes shut, and who, in face of worldly wisdom and parental injunctions, had had the courage to marry for love—and to women in her set, it needs courage to walk into comparative poverty for the sake of something that can be so easily smashed—used the word "romance" with just the suspicion of a sneer. But this girl was only twenty-two. She was young enough to believe that romance is not like a ghost that eludes touching, and how could she have grown so callous and so sophisticated and so cynical as to hold that it is always where you are not, never where you are? Here *was* romance. Here, at her feet, was a man whose very name she did not know, about whom she knew absolutely nothing, who at the sight of her reshaped his life, and without saying a word of love, had given her his heart. Of course it thrilled and stirred her and set a light to her imagination. Its very unexpectedness and unconventionality made its appeal. That was natural, because she was all the more human for having suffered from disillusionment, all the more ready to welcome and to give love because she had never met it before. And so she told herself that she would take a little holiday from the gilded sordidness into which her parents had set her. She would play the child and pretend that things were not as she knew them to be. She would keep her word to Clive, take and make the most of the few strange days that he offered, and be thankful.

All through this inward argument Clive had been talking. She had heard his half-light account of the things that he had been doing at the university, of his brother "dear old George's" mannerisms and characteristics, of how he and his mother managed to live and keep up appearances on a dwindling and over-taxed income, of why he himself had made up his mind to go wandering, "being nothing, meaning nothing, intending nothing." And finally, having come to a conclusion, hav-

ing deliberately severed herself from actualities, and assumed the part of a girl as unfettered as the man who gave her his confidences, she concentrated wholly on the moment, forgot the past, refused to accept the future, and allowed the present, with its moonlight and sea-lullaby and unspoken love, to dominate.

She laughed and bent closer to Clive. "I don't suppose that a single one of our civilized friends would believe us if we told them that we are going to remain in such a place as Dover for several days, do you?"

"No," he said. "Poor old Dover! But, you see, civilized people are educated to believe only what they see under their noses. Everything is improbable that they have not seen for themselves. It's like experience. It has to be undergone to be believed in."

"You talk like a book," she said.

"Why not?" he answered, with a laugh in his eyes. "I'm young, thank Heaven, and I shall talk stacks of books before I find out with a shock that all my amazing truths were discovered thousands of years before I was born. Personally, I don't care whether you and I are in Dover or New Haven; or any other place. We're together on earth, and that's good enough for me."

"And for me," she said, and gave him her hand.

He took it quickly and pressed the palm of it to his lips. "If I hadn't found you to-night I wonder what would have become of me," he said rather gravely.

"Don't you think you would have found someone else somewhere?" She asked the question because she knew what his answer would be, and because, woman-like, she wanted to be told.

He shook his head. "No, never. Men and women only have one life and one love. Mostly they spoil both, and sometimes they get through pretty well because even if they don't love they are well loved. But among all the millions who shoulder past each other on their way

there is for every man just one woman and for every woman the one essential man. If they come together a miracle is performed and all God's angels bespangle the sky."

She was only twenty-two and so she said: "Yes, that's true," with the exquisite assurance of her youth, "and having found me—what then?"

He kissed the answering palm again. "You'll see," he replied, with a sort of ring in his voice. "I shall take life by the scruff of the neck. I shall attack it and join the men who struggle to do things and make things, and move things on. I knew I should the moment I saw you. You looked at me, and the wanderer's pack that I had light-heartedly strapped to my shoulders—it didn't weigh much, believe me!—fell with a thud. . . . I'm going back, for your sake, under the inspiration of youth. I'm going to hitch my wagon to a star, to you. I'm going to show them all that the effete Clive Hurbert can shake off the clogging effects of the accident of birth, the false security that belongs to men who are born in the enclosure that remains like a little island behind the great onward tide. In fact, I'm going to try and be a man, *your* man."

He said all this very simply and earnestly and with a sort of triumph, and when he stopped the girl took back her hand.

It was all too serious. Providence had placed the making of a man's life unexpectedly into her power. It was for her to lead on or to turn back. It came to her, as this man's almost inarticulate recitation of his new creed was given word by word, that she couldn't, after all, escape from fate, or dodge, even for a little while, its relentless hand. Pretence was impossible, for this was love. She must not play any other part than her own. As she was she must remain.

She said: "Take me back. I'm cold."

In an instant he was on his feet. "What a thoughtless brute I am!" he said, and lifted her up.

They went back wordlessly, but all the way he held her hand. It was his. He had the right. She shook her head when he asked if she would have "coffee or tea or something," and went straight across the deserted hall to the lift. He followed her in, and as though it were perfectly natural walked with her along the corridor to her room. A sort of sob, a thing of awful regret, shook her as she saw him draw up short when she turned the handle of the door and stand, self-conscious, for the first time. And then he said "Oh, God!" and took her in his arms, kissed her lips and was gone.

The following morning a note was handed to Clive as he stood waiting in the hall, with expectant eyes on the clock. The writing, firm and rather large, with the t's crossed straightly above the letter, was exactly as he knew that it would be. He went over to one of the huge windows, muffled with curtains, and opened it quickly.

"I've slept awfully badly," it ran, "so I'm having breakfast in my room. Don't wait in the hotel for me. Go to the place on the cliffs where we sat last night and I will join you there in an hour. I've got something to tell you."

So Clive had breakfast alone. And when the luggage porter came in and asked if he was catching the boat for Calais, he answered: "No, thanks, I'm not," in a voice that sent the man away wondering what amazing stroke of luck had befallen the tall young man with the straight back who was so good to look at.

When he went out he found that a sea fog had built a grey wall at the edge of the cliffs and was rolling softly over the country like damp smoke. All the anxious conversation of ships was going on and their deep, raucous

voices were continually raised in warning. The wind had fallen away and everything was wet to the touch.

But Clive walked in a sort of ecstasy. What did it matter to him now if the sea, with its once alluring horizon, were blotted out? It called him no longer. Beyond the soft, mysterious line over which all his thoughts were concentrated a few hours before there was nothing that he needed. He had found his woman, his mate. He had found the one golden thing that made the place in which he stood the desired haven. The earth's steady pulse beat out a song for him as he swung along. He was consumed with the perfect satisfaction that comes to every aimless, drifting thing when an anchorage is found, to every objectless man when he discovers the meaning of life. None of the romance of his meeting with this beautiful girl affected him, or tinged it with the pleasant colours of sentimentality. The more he thought about it the more certain he became that it had been arranged by the unseen hand of Providence, that plays a greater part in the lives of humanity than is supposed in a century whose god is science and whose fetish is individualism. He had been arrested, awakened, on the very verge of a plunge into wilful indifference. He had been connected with another human being at the moment when he had started out to maintain an utterly detached and selfish attitude toward life. Something of the hitherto dormant religious feeling that he had inherited from his Catholic ancestors took on a sort of blossom in his heart, and he stood, one of the most modern of modern men, bare-headed beneath the sky that he was unable to see, and gave God thanks.

Of all the peculiar paradoxes that dog our heels, the most peculiar is that which gives man the power to see more clearly in the dark than in the light.

The girl laid her hand on his arm. He turned with

an exclamation of joy to find her with a pale face and large, tired eyes.

Before he could ask her what was the matter she held out her left hand, palm up, and said: "Look!"

He held the fingers tightly, thrilling her with the vitality of his touch. He did look, but all that he saw was a delicately-cut hand with a generous thumb and well-marked lines in its small palm.

He looked up inquiringly, and she pointed to the gold ring that she had replaced.

"Well," he asked, and then he drew in his breath, let her hand go, put his hands on her shoulders and peered into her eyes. "My God, you're married!"

"Yes," she said.

He held her tighter, as though to keep her away from all other men. "But you can't be. It's impossible. *I* love you. *I've* found you. You belong to me, you're mine."

"That's true," she said. "But, all the same, I'm married."

He gave a laugh and put his arms around her and held her all against him. "What is all this?" he asked. "You're putting me to some test. You don't suppose, do you, that you and I can have been permitted to meet like this for you to be unable to give yourself to me to love and make happy? I don't believe it. It's altogether unbelievable. Things aren't done like that. Let me take that ring off."

"You may take it off," she said, "but not you and not anything except death can unmarry me. I ought to have told you this at once. I simply had not the courage. Don't be angry, don't blame me too much. I knew you for the man of all my dreams, and I was weak enough to try for a little happiness, to escape from my hideous bonds for a little hour or two. I'm the poor, wretched girl you spoke about whose cage is Harwich House. I'm

the Duchess of Harwich, and oh, my God! what wouldn't I give to change places with the telephone girl in the hotel!"

They sat down, side by side. They were walled in by the fog, cut off from the world, isolated, for the moment, from all eyes. But to both there was no sense of isolation. No fog, however heavy, and no love, however wonderful and all-conquering, could prevent the young unhappy girl from belonging to the man whose name was hers, and whose arm had been thrust suddenly between her and the man who had so triumphantly given her his heart.

Clive said nothing. He only looked. What was there to say? What was there to do except to sit crushed under the shock of this appalling fact. A few moments ago he had thanked God for life and love. His very faith was shaken by what he had just heard.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I shall always love you," he said.

"And I am yours till I die," she answered, taking his hand and putting it to her lips.

"But what are you going to do?" he asked, repeating her question.

"Never see each other again after to-day."

"You might as well tell me to put a pistol in my mouth"—and then he burst out, holding her roughly: "This is Dover. In half an hour the boat leaves for Calais. Better people than we have run away together and faced this problem with courage. You're only a girl. You've got all your life in front of you. Are you going to be asked to sacrifice it all just because your people let you marry a debauchee before you were old enough to know what you were doing? Why, good God, you ought to be able to go before any judge and demand to be set free! If a boy not yet twenty-one isn't held

responsible for his thoughtless debts, why should a girl who knows nothing be forced to keep to a hideous bargain, the very terms of which she didn't understand? I love and adore you, and together we can conquer the world. Come away with me. I claim you by right. You are as much mine now as if you had been married to me in church. Quickly! There's no time to waste."

He got up and pulled her to her feet. His face was white and his eyes had gone black.

But she shook her head. "You don't really want me to go," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because you love me too much."

"I love you with my soul and body and brain, and I've only just begun to love you. You have the rest of my life in your hands."

"I believe you've had all mine and always," she said. "But don't ask me to run away with you again, because if you do, I shall. I want to. I'd give everything I have never to leave you, and all fair people who know the truth would say that I'm right. But that wouldn't be enough."

"What do you mean? You love me and I love you, and which of us need put forward excuses? Don't waste time. Come."

She shook her head. "No," she said. "This is love. If it is to be the most beautiful thing in our lives, we must keep it good and sweet. You wouldn't love me so much if I gave way, and I should begin to love you less if you made me weak. I could never stand by the altar again and reswear all the vows that I broke because you and I hadn't the courage to fight against temptation. We love each other too much to smear it like this. I can't go."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Go back. Go on. You've stopped me just for a mo-

ment on my way home. It isn't home. Where you are will always be home to me, but my place is in Harwich House, now more than ever. The man I've married is ill. He claims me. I was going back with dragging feet. Now, loving you, I shall hurry. I love you and I shall try to be good enough to hold your love."

She held up her lips. He bent down and kissed them, and then stood back and looked at her. He seemed to be fixing the sweet oval of her face, the lines of her eyebrows, the sensitiveness of her nostrils and mouth, the feeling and the honesty and the bravery of her eyes in his memory. He stood there, tall and strong and passionate, with breath going and coming thickly, with an extraordinary suggestion of the primeval, the merciless, urgent, hungry, uncontrolled man of nature all about him—in his eyes that had gone black and hot, in the pulse in his nostrils, in the veins that stood out in his neck, in the half-crouching attitude of his square shoulders. And with the fog creeping about their heads these two young things, with all the amazing, unguessable possibilities of life in front of them, might have been standing among the burning ruins of their hopes. You might have expected him to pick the girl up in his arms and with a great shout carry her to his hut among the trees and lay her down upon his skins.

But all through this silent, moveless moment the young Duchess remained straight and slim and sweet, with a high head and her eyes flaming with trust in this man's honour and an unutterable belief in his love and chivalry.

He suddenly took off his hat and stood bareheaded, and as he gave her an involuntary bow a queer choking noise came from his throat.

"I will take you back," he said.

And then, before a quiet but determined breeze, the fog was rolled up like a great grey blind.

PART II

I

A MIDDLE-AGED woman, dressed in what some people called offensively horsey clothes, with her round, boyish, merry face burned the colour of brick-dust, and a man's straw hat jammed well down over a small, neat head of grey hair, drew up short and screwed up her shrewd, optimistic, sarcastic eyes. The old dachshund, gone grey about the muzzle, did the same, and having given out a bronchial bark, began to wag his tail. Clive came slowly towards them, with his eyes on the worn flagstones of the terrace, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

A clear, incisive, rather high-pitched voice rang out: "Clive! . . . What the dickens brings *you* here!"

Clive was rather glad to be able to bend over and pat his aunt's old pal, as she called the wagging dog. If there was one person on earth whose eyes he would always rather not meet when there was something in his mind that he wished to retain, it was Lady Emily Hurbert, spinster, dog-fancier, breeder of race-horses, owner of the sharpest tongue and possessor of the most apt and slangy vocabulary in all Cheshire, to say nothing of a little old heart so warm and tender and mischievous that all poor devils left her with a coin, all animals came to her in absolute confidence, and all parsons returned to her like cats on hot bricks.

"I've chucked the notion of going away—I mean yet," he said.

"But, my dear, good, charming ass, you've done the trick. You *went* away. You broke your mother's heart, gave me several sleepless nights—I *don't* think—and according to the papers left Dover for Calais yesterday morning."

There was no smile on Clive's usually light-hearted, easy-going face as he looked up. "Oh! Did I?"

Lady Emily swung a muscular arm round his shoulder and laid a kiss on his cheek that could be heard for a mile. "Um," she thought, "some queer thing's happened to my boy. Looks as if he'd been in a railway accident—or is it a woman? I'll get it out of him before the day's over, or else I'll slowly masticate my blessed hat, ribbon and all."

Clive looked about him, with a sort of affection. The angle of the old, warm house blocked the wide terrace over which men and women of many generations had walked. Spread out below were the lawns and gardens and flaming flower-beds that ran out to meet the park whose great oaks and big-girthed beeches seemed to mount guard over the family whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers had climbed about their branches and cut initials in their bark. The July sun touched it all with glory.

"Mother well? and have you got over your lumbago?"

Lady Emily grinned, showing a line of strong white teeth. "Anybody would think that you'd been away a year," she said, "instead of a couple of days. Have you been up to see the mother yet?"

"No," said Clive.

"Well, if you want to do a kindly action and bring back joy into a dear good woman's heart, trot along at once. In all probability you'll find her lighting another metaphorical candle to keep the devil away from you in France. . . . I'm darned glad you've come back, Clivey. It wasn't quite playing the game to go, was it?"

"No," said Clive.

Lady Emily nearly jumped out of her skin. She would have betted everything she had in the bank—which wasn't much—that he would have contested her point hotly. The recollection of an argument they had had on this very point only a few days before was cut deep in her mind. Something very queer had certainly happened, without a doubt. But this woman, although consumed with the blazing curiosity of her indispensable sex, was as shrewd as a lawyer. Knowing men through and through, and knowing her nephew even better than that, seeing that she had insisted on sharing him with his mother, she didn't make the egregious blunder of asking a direct question. Men detest direct questions, especially when they have not carried out carefully laid down plans. She pursued the policy of the pig-driver, and led him away from the spot on which she was determined to place him.

"I'll go into the house with you," she said. "How's London? Hot and fuggy as usual?"

"Pretty much," said Clive. "I dined at the club last night and slept in my rooms. The season's more or less over."

"Yes, I suppose so. Thank Heaven, I'm not a slave to the idiotic, incessant, monotonous round. While dyed-haired women, who ought to know better, are squeezed into stays two sizes too small for them, and are trying to smile like angels with tight shoes giving them the very deuce, I'm striding about airy stables and seeing that a healthy line of thoroughbred pups get through the temptations and dangers of adventurous childhood." She pointed below. "Look! Ain't the roses toppin' this year?"

Clive followed the spatulate, capable finger with his eyes, in which there was nothing but the beautiful face

of the girl who was married to the wrong man. "Topping," he said.

"Um," thought Lady Emily, taking a sidelong look at him through half-closed lashes. "I wonder what it is? Can't be a woman. She hasn't had time. Is it money? Don't think so. Clive doesn't worry about little things like that. Dash me if I ever saw the boy with such a frightful hump." She fell into step with him and flipped her fingers to the ancient dog. This aristocratic old character had been stirred into a temporary condition of alertness at the sight of Clive, to whom all animals took an instant and instinctive liking. A man to whom a cat, a dog, a horse and a baby will trust themselves without a qualm will never tender a bogus cheque, and may safely be asked to look after the wife of his friend.

At the end of the terrace Clive slipped his arm through his aunt's and looked at her with that inimitable smile of his which had made several of the difficult passages of his life easy sailing. "Why don't you ask me bolt out the question that's burning your tongue like a hot potato?" he asked.

Lady Emily's eyebrows went high and her eyes were as innocent as those of a gazelle. "Question? What question?"

"Oh, *you* know as well as I do. If you can wait till after dinner to-night without going off with a bang I'll come up to your den and make a clean breast of it. I never wanted good advice and the help of a real woman so much in my life, Aunt Emily."

A look of extraordinary tenderness and yearning came into Lady Emily's weather-worn face. She stood side by side with this tall, excellent fellow with all the pride and sympathy and love of a mother. She was warmed and rewarded by his desire to give her his confidence, and a very rare tear trembled on her eyelash. She was one of those numerous women under whose brisk and cheerful

exterior there is an everlasting sorrow, to whom motherhood, for some reason or other, had been denied, and all her rich fund of the maternal instinct had been forced to find a vent in devotion to animals.

"Good for you, old man," she said. "Your horsey old aunt won't fail you, be sure of that."

II

CLIVE went up to his own rooms. They were in the tower of the west wing of the house, and were led up to by a narrow winding staircase whose stone steps had been worn into saucers. One room, low and beamed and wide, with an uneven floor of unpolished oak—which was, for all that, shiny from the passing of feet—a queer fireplace at the side of which there was a secret door leading out to the roof—the rapscallion Charles II. had used it during one of his weak-kneed attempts to assert himself—three slit windows, all barred with rusty iron, and several fine pieces of Jacobean furniture, led into the other. This was more or less the same size, the same shape and build, and made a bedroom in which no man slept who was fearful of ghosts. Like the rest of the house, it reeked with history and echoed with the footsteps of the dead, and on its narrow, cold-looking bed William Hurbert had been murdered in his sleep during the Wars of the Roses.

These two rooms, cut off from all the others by an abbey-like door, all nail-studded, had belonged to a series of second sons. For this reason they had been Clive's since he had been old enough to sleep alone.

It was with curious feelings that he stood in the middle of the sitting-room once more. Only a few days before he had said good-bye to it, and all the numerous mementoes of his boyhood and youth, with immense relief.

The Miracle of Love

The old house seemed to him to have lost its meaning. It had outlived itself and dwindled into a mere show-place. To him there was something so pathetic about it all that it depressed and weighed him down. Up to its very gates a thriving, new town had run like a swift, exhilarated, undisciplined stream, with throbbing factories and glaring red-brick schools, municipal buildings and innumerable streets of small, exactly similar houses, which, in their flat-faced, cheap, undigested monotony of appearance, resembled to an almost ludicrous degree the half-baked people who lived in them. It seemed to stand in the way of the strong, irresistible current of so-called advancement like a disused dam. It was a sort of Rip Van Winkle, hoary and carbuncled with time, peering through the branches of old trees at a new race with new ideas and almost a new language. His brother, fifteenth Duke of Cheshire, was one of the small band of men who were referred to by the comic papers and those that were unconsciously comic as a figure of fun. He was spoken of by pantomime comedians and *Punch* as a backwoodsman, and by the shifty, glib, self-seeking party politician into whose inefficient and dishonest hands the land of England had fallen, as a "damned Duke." He had felt himself and his brother and his people to be mere show people, pathetically, comically out of place in a pushing, demolishing, self-educated century. He had turned his back on it and them with a deep breath, intending to go out as Mr. Clive Hurbert, as plain a man as all the other plain men, on an equality with the plainest. He had gone first to London, and then to Dover, with all the relief of one of the figures in a pageant who had shed his historically picturesque garments and was back again in life. To find himself home once more, in its wonderful but unreal atmosphere, looking again through its barred windows at the grand old park which the politicians were waiting rapaciously to

grab, seeing again, away in the distance, the smoke of the factories that belched forth incessantly, and listening to the graveyard quietude that always rested over the crumbling, fragrant place, brought back the sensation of being an anomaly, a gargoyle on the walls of a garish white jerry-built structure out of which the workmen had only just gone, leaving their heterogeneous mess of shavings and lime, broken pipes and half-empty paint-pots behind them.

He had taken Helena from Dover to London. All the way through the garden-like country of Kent, with its acres of pale green, lopping hops pole high, he had sat opposite to her in a carriage in which they were alone. He had attempted with no great success to talk of impersonal things, and had parted with her at Victoria Station among a crowd of home-goers with a long, silent hand-grasp. He had shut the door of her excellent, unnoticeable limousine, and stood bare-headed until it was out of sight like a man who had not yet recovered from a serious illness or an awful loss. And when he drove to his two small rooms in Bury Street, St. James's, he was no longer the undergraduate, the boy of twenty-five, to whom life was a single-handed game, an adventure, a pastime, but an affair in which another took a more prominent part than himself—a period of years which could be frittered away in the spendthrift spirit, leaving nothing tangible to show for it, or made the most and best of because there was someone who looked to him to spend it well.

And it was with this new and surprising sensation of having been suddenly awakened from sleep, of having been given the answer to a riddle so simple that he had never considered it worth while to solve, that he went home again—a man.

He saw plainly enough where he stood at that moment. He made no futile effort to cast any sort of

glamour over the hard fact that faced him. He loved Helena, the young Duchess of Harwich, not with a momentary passion, but for all time, with all his heart and soul and body. He had played the game at Dover because she had put him on his honour. How long, being young and impatient, loving like a man and a strong man, with all the natural desires of youth and a great longing to possess what was his by all the laws of nature, he would be able to continue to play the game he did not know; he was afraid to ask himself. He knew —she had told him—that he had only to go and say to her: "Come, you must, you shall, come," and she would follow. How long would he be able to resist? And, if he did resist, what ultimate good would be achieved except that of having sacrificed a great, blazing, beacon-like love on the effete altar of a man-made law?

Well, he would see. He came of a race of men and women who had never failed to take what they wanted, whether lawfully or unlawfully. They had not been held back by any such mere plebeian shibboleth as morality, and if, when nearing the end of their lives, they had time to think of God and the great hereafter and their silent moments were made uneasy by a little fear or a snippet of superstition, they built a church in atonement for those unlicensed acts which even then they looked back upon with a thrill of pleasure. This young man had, therefore, several things to fight against in his attempt to restrain himself. There were his inherited instincts, handed down to him from a long line of tyrannizers, masters of serfs, lords of men-at-arms, kings' men and rulers, all born to the high-chinned intolerant belief that they were unique among God's creatures, to pick stolen fruit with impunity and thus confer a favour, to bend the knee to nothing but defeat, to no man but the King. And there was his own Gilbertian upbringing in an atmosphere of Ruritanian regality in which the middle-

class rabid snobbishness of Eton and Oxford had taken their share. He must have been almost inhuman if, underneath his uncomfortable sense of humour and realization of the ridiculous, there was not a good deal of the Hurbertianism which made the instant gratification of a whim and a desire his right by birth and position. His fight, then, was against himself as well as his ancestry, his own overwhelming passion and the masterly inability to apply the common truths and ordinary laws that was the privilege of his people. It was to be a fight indeed, and he knew it. But whether he also knew it or not, he had two good weapons in his possession. One was a streak of idealism. The other the constant prayers of his mother.

He waited until the dear old lady had had her afternoon nap before he went to her room. He went before anyone could have had time to tell her of his return. Her room was a large one in the front and centre of the house. It had a unique atmosphere. It showed the hands of a number of women who had been at the head of the family, each in her time. The present Duchess had introduced the unmistakable note of early Victorianism, and the antimacassars, a small, prim, upright piano with a lugubrious piece of hand-work set into the front of it, a number of so-called ornaments under glass cases, and a collection of the sermons of Wilberforce, the novels of Mrs. Hemans, and the series of "My Life in the Highlands," by Victoria R. and I., seemed as incongruous and very nearly as comic as a silk hat on a man wearing a powdered wig and knee-breeches.

Clive opened the door softly. His mother was sitting alone in that enormous room in which not even a tramp could have made himself comfortable. Her chair was drawn up near the window to allow the light to fall over her left shoulder. With her small soft figure, dressed in very plain black, with a neat touch of white at the neck

and the wrists, her perfectly white, soft hair brushed scrupulously out of any semblance of curl, her small, pretty features and large brown eyes behind gold-rimmed spectacles—rather bovine in their wideness apart—she might very well have been the housekeeper of the place, a dear little old lady about whom everything seemed soft and gentle, and who looked as though her passage through life had been accompanied by much grief out of which she had managed to come with a sort of determined cheerfulness and with the childlike and beautiful application of her religious belief.

She was bending with a little wistful smile over some red knitting, which looked as though it might eventually be a child's petticoat. Clice expected to see a bookmark in some book that would give comfort to a woman who was blessed with a prodigal son—blessed because prodigals naturally lie warmest in a mother's heart.

He went on tiptoe across the room and put his arms around the soft shoulders.

"It's Clive!" she cried. "It's Clive—come back!"

"Yes, mother."

She got up and turned round and looked up into his face. "Something came to you and told you that it wasn't right to go away and leave us."

"Yes, mother. Something came to me."

"Thank God!" she said, and put her arms round his neck and her little soft hand on his chest. Very precious tears chased each other down her face. And as Clive held this good, warm-hearted woman, not yet out of mourning for a husband who had been dead for fifteen years, whose principles allowed of no divergence from the long, narrow path of virtue and righteousness, and to whom love was only permissible when it had received the blessing of the Church, he asked himself whether he was going to be strong enough to give her reason to continue to thank God for his return.

The Miracle of Love

III

FIVE minutes after his mother had gone to bed that night Clive felt a tap on his arm. His mind was in London in Harwich House, and in imagination he had the little head of the girl who had altered the whole course of his life on his shoulder.

"Stir your stumps, sonny," said Lady Emily. "I'm an early bird, y'know, so if we're to have our heart-to-heart talk to night . . ."

"Thanks awfully," said Clive. "I'm with you."

"Come along to my den, then." She flipped her fingers and old master dachshund reluctantly uncurled himself, yawned loudly, and descended with elderly dignity from his cushion in an arm-chair.

They went through the picture-gallery, closely hung with portraits of Hurberts—some superb specimens of the work of old masters, others fairly good efforts on the part of Georgian and early Victorian portrait painters—and then through the hall to a suite of rooms named after the unfortunate fortunate Darnley. One of these Lady Emily had made her sanctum, and there were her photographs of horses and foals, dogs and their litters, and a collection of books on the breeding of both. There was also a very workmanlike desk kept with scrupulous tidiness, and a large tin of cigarettes within easy reach of it. The old mantelboard was filled with photographs of Clive in all the stages of his years, and these in their silver frames were thrown up by the light of two groups of large altar candles. There were only two photographs of George, the elder son, among them all, one in his uniform as an officer in the First Life Guards, the other in the rough picturesque clothes of a big-game hunter, with several native bearers grinning around him. In both this great, big, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, red-

headed, good-natured man looked supremely contented with himself and life.

Lady Emily sat down on one chair and put up her almost absurdly small feet on another. She was, with reason, proud of them. It was the only touch of feminine vanity that she permitted herself to indulge in. "You may go for my cigarettes without fear or trembling," she said. "They're a new brand sent down to me by the Stratford woman. I lent her one of my dogs for a service—Champion Badweather III.—and she gracefully acknowledged the obligation in that way. It's the only time she ever made anyone a gift in her life—except when she presented Tom Stratford with a son and heir, by accident." She imitated the mewing of a cat in the most lifelike manner and gave a short laugh.

Clive helped himself and stood with his back to the fireplace. For several moments he puffed in silence, letting the smoke trickle through his nostrils. When he spoke it was very quietly, and he turned a pair of grave eyes on his perfectly comfortable but frightfully curious aunt.

"Do you believe in God?" he asked.

The elderly woman gave a jump. "Heaven bless the boy! Yes, of course I do. Very few women reach my age, after an illness or two and some bad disappointments, without winning for themselves a sort of faith. Why?"

Clive thought again. "Do you believe that God brings a man face to face suddenly with the woman who is his —his, whoever she may be, however placed—if he is not to take her?"

"By Jove! then it *is* a woman," thought Lady Emily. "When a boy like this blessed Clive of ours is hit it lasts a lifetime. All I hope is that she's a gentlewoman." . . . "My dear fellow," she said aloud, with a touch of male philosophy, "if God desired every man to take then and

there the woman who made his heart leap and his blood dance, there'd have to be a thousand divorce-court judges and a whole army of hangmen. Why do you ask these extraordinary questions?"

"Because," said Clive, "I met my wife at Dover the night before I intended to cross to Calais, to disappear from here and from England for years. I don't believe it was by accident."

Lady Emily put down her feet. She was excited. If Clive had a wife his wanderlust and irresponsibility would be things of the past. But already jealousy began to jump in her blood. "So that's why you've turned back, is it?" she said. "Well, it's quick work, but we queer people do things quickly, or not at all. When are you going to marry the girl? To-morrow, the day after, or are you going to master your impatience and give us time to do the thing properly?"

"She's married," replied Clive grimly.

"Married? And you talk about taking her?"

"Yes—and I think about it every second in the day. I let her go once because she said things I had no arguments to get over, and I wanted to see if I couldn't break all Hurbert records and play the game. But how long can I go on without her, and, what's more, is the game worth it? That's what I've come to ask you."

"Well, you've given me a pretty hard nut to crack, old boy. Sometimes the game isn't worth any sort of a farthing dip, and the man who plays it loses his one chance of happiness only to gain the doubtful blessing of a martyr's wreath. But, at other times, the playing of the game according to all its rules, however apparently unjust they are, turns a careless boy into a man worthy of the name and a silly girl into a mighty good woman. First of all, who is she?"

"The Duchess of Harwich."

Lady Emily let out a long, significant whistle through her teeth.

"My sainted grandmother!" she said. "*That* girl!"

"Why do you say 'that girl' like that?"

Lady Emily got up and walked about with her hands clasped behind her back. "Perhaps it was a good thing that I didn't qualify her by a pretty strong adjective. Now, don't glare at me. I'm not afraid of *you,* y'know. And I always say precisely what I mean under all circumstances. You know that. If you don't want me to go on, say so, and I'll shut up and lie low. If you do, square your shoulders and give me my head."

"Please go on," said Clive.

"Right. . . . What sort of an opinion do you expect any self-respecting female to have of a young person who deliberately gives herself to a man, almost old enough to be her father, whose life has been bespattered with almost every form of vice?"

"Helena was too young to know anything about all that, my dear aunt."

"Think so? Is a girl ever too young to know what's obvious to everybody else? I'm not prejudiced, although I *am* talking about my own sex. But what I ask myself is this. Why did that girl walk open-eyed into marriage with that rip, that dissolute creature, whose name is a byword, except for his title? And what is a girl who gives her body in exchange for a title, except one of whom it is difficult to find anything good to say?"

"She was forced into it," said Clive hotly.

Lady Emily shrugged her shoulders. "My dear, good boy, that could have been said of her if she had belonged to the last generation. I grant you that. But if you can find me any girl belonging to this one who can be forced into doing anything, however small and unimportant, especially by her parents, you'll have laid your hand on

the eighth wonder of the world. Clive, I wish you'd caught that boat to Calais."

There was silence for a moment. Then a little smile came into the boy's eyes and he went over to the elderly woman, who was standing very straight and watching him anxiously, and put an affectionate hand on her shoulder. "Aunt Emily," he said, "you may take my word for it that, if I am to do any good thing in my life, or any useful or deserving thing with it, it will be because of Helena and for Helena and through Helena. She is as good as my mother and you, and if anyone on God's earth knows this, I do. Accept that. It's true. It permits of no argument, however much the evidence of her cursed marriage is against her. That being so, tell me this. Am I to be asked to let the best years of my life slip away in loneliness, eating my heart out for the girl who will come to me if I ask her, or am I to face facts and scandal and divorce and misinterpretation and take her into my life?"

"My dear Clive," replied Lady Emily, "I am a good woman, like the rest of the good women, only because I have never been tremendously tempted. I know very well that rules and principles all go to the wall when love seizes the heart. The history of the world is alive with cases of men who have ruined careers, institutions, and nations for the sake of love. Cynics may jeer and sham philosophers maunder about there being far more urgent things in life than love and sex; but are there? I don't think so. No one really thinks so. The very earth would be empty without them. If you are mad about this girl, not even a lunatic asylum will prevent you from making either a complete fool or a complete hero of yourself. I'm a woman who's never had luck when it came to love, so how in the name of all that's marvellous can I advise you? I know jolly well that advice is never any more good than a pocket-handkerchief

tied to the mast of a boat running against wind and tide. You must do what you think best; but—yes, I *do* add a but—please give a little consideration to the girl, to your mother and to your family, and God give you His help, my dear."

IV

A WEEK went by placidly. Clive, seething with conflicting emotions, sat about in the sun on the terrace, watching the movelessness of the park, a creature to the shipboard regularity and system with which the old house was run. Breakfast at eight, luncheon at one, tea at four-thirty, dinner at seven, bed at half-past ten. And as he conformed to the rules and regulations with scrupulous punctiliousness, with a soul stirred into revolt and the desire to break laws, he was an odd and even a dangerous example of one of the many paradoxes which life seems to go out of its way to form. A man may lie on his back in a garden made indescribably beautiful and wonderful by the blaze of God's flowers and the throbbing of birds' songs, with peace in a cloudless sky and the quiet, honest business of bees and butterflies going on everywhere, with murder in his heart or with the plans for international war formulating in his brain. Or he may sit in a garret without the knowledge of where his next meal is coming from, with abominable clothes and dirt all about him, and not be willing to change places with a millionaire because the woman on the bed loves him and follows him gladly.

Clive was very alive to the happiness that he had brought to the two women by his return. They both went farther out of their way than usual to do things for him and they made a competition of spoiling him. The mother who saw the working of Providence in her hitherto determinedly easy-going son's return, watched

him with tears in her eyes. She was certain that he had been "enabled," as she put it in her old-fashioned way, to rid himself of his satirical attitude towards his life as he saw it, and that, as he sat with his long legs stretched out in front of him and a straw hat tilted over his eyes, he was wondering what work he could take up, what useful and honourable thing there was to which he could put his hand. It gave Lady Emily, who knew why Clive had turned back and guessed what was going on in his brain, several pangs to watch how her little sister treated this boy of hers. He was her convalescent, creeping back to health after a long and bad illness. He was out of danger, but needed the care and tender treatment that can only be given by a mother, and there was all about her that wonderful, peaceful air of joy and satisfaction that goes with maternity and the love of women when they have the particular object of their affection safely anchored to the house, either by illness or necessity; and not for the first time this shrewd, observant Lady Emily, childless because she had never been fortunate enough to be loved by the right man, was struck by the peculiar and inevitable pain that goes with motherhood. It seemed to her a cruel thing that this brave and faithful little woman had gone through all the agonies of childbirth, had given all the best of her thoughts and prayers and devotion to this boy in his boyhood and youth, only to have nothing of his confidence when, as a man, he stood at the parting of the ways.

On his part, Clive went out of his way to delight his mother. He waited on her as though she were his sweetheart. He showed her all manner of the little memorable tendernesses that his alert imagination could devise. He talked earnestly about George and his impending marriage and what it meant, if successful, to the family and its future. He played cribbage with her after dinner—a game he detested—and read the leading articles from

the daily papers aloud—masses of undigested journalism for which he had nothing but contempt. He lay full stretch on the sofa in her room and listened to her neat, correct and unemotional playing of Chopin and Handel, congratulating her warmly on her touch. He even cut down the number of his daily cigarettes, so that she might not fret at the harm he was building up for himself. And he did these little, difficult, good deeds, which all were entered to his credit by the recording angel, herself a mother, with a smile on his lips and content in his face. It was well done. Lady Emily inwardly called it "stunnin'."

Almost at the moment when his efforts were wearing thin, and his hourly anguish to go to London and to Helena was becoming too painful to bear, George turned up unexpectedly from Central Africa, browner than a berry, fitter than the proverbial fiddle, and as lively as a cricket in his loud-laughter, heavy-treaded way. It was his last bachelor expedition into the wilds that meant far more to him than his title and place, and he was full of it and his hunting successes and escapades. He didn't send a telegram to announce himself or bother to order the motor to meet him at the station. He preferred to potter down, as he called it, and to drive up as a lucky ordinary human being in a musty-smelling, evil-springed station fly which jerked his liver for two miles and a half. And all the way up he held a breezy g-less conversation through the open front window with old man West, who had known him since he was a boy. He sent the car back for his luggage, and as he mounted the worn steps of the place that seemed to him to be an unnecessary load on his shoulders, he gave a great whoop, sang out "Hello! hello!" to the astonished and out-of-breath butler, and went blundering up to his mother's room. And as he stood guffawing in the doorway, with his red hair all clipped close to his head, his eyelashes almost

white against his brick-red skin, his big moustache burned the colour of straw and his eyes as blue as thrushes' eggs, Clive got up. "I can escape," he said to himself excitedly. "By Jove! I can escape at last."

V

IT was a rather curious coincidence that the two brothers should have returned home at the same time —George, with all the honest simplicity of a guileless, cheerful fellow who intended to do his duty; Clive, with reluctant feet so far as family duty was concerned, but burning with the blazing fire of love and stirred into a condition of mental chaos between the new endeavour to curb his desires and the natural impulse to enjoy them.

The difference between the characters of George and Clive had never been so broadly marked. One was a red Hurbert, and the other a black. And it was not strange that just as with the reds of old times there went a slow-going, uncomplaining, inarticulate sense of duty, accompanied by an immense capacity of enjoying and making the best of life, with the blacks there was a certain amount of the Latinism that goes with wild impetuosity, and the totally un-English characteristic of falling headlong, soul-entirely into self-indulgence and romance. These things now came out in these two men, just as surely and unexplainably as the trick of using the left hand comes out in certain families from generation to generation.

His training for the Army, with all its hide-bound, narrowing effects, had made no mark on George. He was like a large St. Bernard dog which, having plunged into the water and swum noisily about, comes out and shakes himself dry. He had gone through Sandhurst and three years' service with the First Life Guards with a com-

plete knowledge of the smallness and mechanism of the life, and enough sense of humour to show him the comic side and enable him to find some pleasure in it. He remained as sound, naïve, open-hearted, good-natured, generous and practical as he had been as a boy. He took pain and grief and worry in the same spirit of pluck as he took a struggle with a big fish or an uphill fight at golf or tennis. He just gritted his teeth, stood up to it and saw it through. If beaten, he accepted the umpire's decision with a little courteous bow. He never allowed himself to indulge in self-pity and never shed tears over spilt milk. He had, God willing, three score years and ten on earth. He found the earth good, although he would willingly have been born to another place on it, and he intended to make the best of things as they came.

Clive was composed of very different stuff. There was nothing of the red type about him. Outwardly extremely quiet, smiling and amenable, possessed of that sort of rare charm that draws friendship and service without any conscious effort, and given admirable good-looks and a keen faculty of going a long way round in order to avoid hurting people's feelings or jarring the peace of an atmosphere, inwardly he was queerly lonely, detached, and given to analysing far too deeply his own actions and the underlying current of affairs and religions. But for a sense of humour, an instant realization of the ridiculous and a disbelief in himself, he might have developed into an artist or gone into the Church. He would stand suddenly arrested in the middle of an undergraduate "rag," and feel an indefinable longing after something high and inspiring that shot through his soul like a sharp arrow. His appreciation of beauty in nature and humanity was sensual only because it had in it an urgent, overwhelming, rushing desire, almost anguish, to touch and possess and keep closely as his own always. He knew vaguely that all through his lazy, en-

joyable, effortless life there had walked in step with him, sometimes seen, sometimes unseen, the spirit of just the one human being without whom, materially, he could never be contented. And it was this recurring, mysterious and beautiful something—spirit, feeling, presence—that rubbed his idealism into occasional flame, and brought out, in his own complete moments, the definite knowledge that he stood utterly alone among the life about him. If he had been the son of a poor man, he would have taken to any creative work with great satisfaction, whether it was in inventing advertisements or painting frescoes. If, even now, with the thick curse of a false training and a useless education upon him, he were to be deprived of his income and brought face to face with utter poverty and want, he had it in him to become a waiter, a pavement artist, or the conductor of a trolley-car, and eventually a man of mark. What he needed was initiative, the impulse to break out of his frame, his setting, his very skin. That done, Heaven only knew to what he might not attain, or win or lose.

That night Clive didn't undress when he got up to his room. He loaded a pipe and stood watching the door and listening. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of times he had done the same thing after having said "Good-night," and he had never waited long before hearing George's heavy tread on the old rubbed steps. There was only two years' difference in the ages of these brothers, and there had never been anything in the lives of either that the other was not told. Theirs was rather more than the ordinary brotherly relationship. They were bosom pals, who admired, respected and loved one another, and although they had been very much apart—George having been at Sandhurst for his army examinations and training and Clive at Eton and Oxford where he might waste time according to the public school and university system—they had kept in close and intimate touch. He

longed to get some help, some actual advice from George now. His aunt had given him none. And, after all, George was the head of the family.

It was curiously natural—this attitude of his. Hitherto he had never hesitated to do precisely what he wanted at the moment when it appealed to him. Afterwards he was prepared to call himself an ass or be called an ass by George. What did it matter? But now, old enough to begin to know how to rule himself—and his training and complete independence had made him far older than his years—he felt queerly young and boyish. He knew that men didn't run away with other men's wives if they could help it. He had been put on his honour by *this* other man's wife, but he told himself again and again, well knowing how specious the argument was, that as he didn't know the man, honour only came into it by being dragged in by the scruff of its neck. He wanted someone—George, above all—to say "Go and take her," because this was what he most wanted to do himself. In fact, he wanted advice, and, like the rest of us, he would take it eagerly if it synchronized with the thing that every drop of blood in his body urged him to do.

George kept him waiting about ten minutes. He came up rather more quickly than usual. He was deeply anxious to know what lay at the back of his brother's eyes, and had had no opportunity so far to find out. He had laid himself out to please "the dear old mum," as he called her, and had been all day reading aloud the diary of his expedition, with numerous comments, droll and whimsical and sound, all made in that characteristic, g-less, colloquial way of his that was utterly unaffected and unself-conscious.

"Good man," he said, as he flung open the old heavy door. "Knew I should find you waitin'."

"Well, rather," said Clive, giving him a smile.

George got out of his dinner-jacket. The thing was

irksome to him. Then he rolled up his sleeves—his hard, muscular arms were sun-baked—loaded a pipe from the fat blue bowl stamped in colours with the arms of Clive's college, and laid himself full stretch on a long, low settee, with his red head among a pile of smoke-blue cushions.

"Toppin' quarters of yours, these," he said. "I shall lumber up here in the old way every night you're at home, after I'm married and done for. Eh?"

"I should think so," said Clive. "That is, as long as Edith allows you to. *She* may have something to say, y' know."

George laughed. It would have shaken the walls of any of the jerry-built houses in the new town two miles away. "Allow? Edith? My dear chap, that word isn't goin' to enter into my matrimonial dictionary, believe me."

"No?"

"Of course not. She's a dear, good little girl, and I shall train her carefully, and of course tenderly. Like most only daughters of rich men, she's been allowed to grow up in the belief that she's a sort of little queen. But as she loves me—there's no doubt about that, thank God; it's the only thing that makes the marriage decent or possible—it'll be easy to alter all that, eh? By Jove! Do you know this affair comes off in six weeks' time? Hard luck, I call it. I'm no marryin' man, y' know. If Providence had given the matter two minutes' consideration, I should have been born in the back-woods of Canada and spent a healthy and useful life cuttin' down trees. As it is, one of the illustrated weekly papers I got hold of comin' down summed the affair up in the only possible way—words to this effect: 'The marriage of the Duke of Cheshire, the poorest of the Dukes, will be the next big social wedding. As everybody knows, his bride will be Miss Edith Creston, the daughter of Creston's Linoleum, and the money that goes with her will put the

Cheshire family in funds for the first time for two generations.' Frank, isn't it?"

"Hideously frank!" said Clive.

"However, there it is. It's no earthly good kickin' against the pricks. Money must be got in somehow, and Edith'll look very cheery and nice about the place. Charmin' little foot! I shall never love her, I'm afraid, but I shall do my best. I've drilled myself into believing that I'm very fond of her, and I really believe I am. At present it stays at that. If some day soon I wake up to find that I love the dear little soul, by gum, Clivey, I'll endow a hospital and let off fireworks. In any case, I shall play the game, old boy, so don't worry about that. No little villas at Cannes or other constantly blue places for me. A good husband, a good father, and a good shot. That's my future life in a nutshell. What are you goin' to do? The last letter I got from dear old mum that was waiting for me at Cook's, Cape Town, deplored the fact that you had become a socialist or something, and were goin' off as Mr. Clive Hurbert to poke about foreign cities. Not a bad notion. When do you start?"

"I'm not going," said Clive.

"Oh? Why? If I were you I wouldn't hang about as a sort of ornament for the firestove, the star turn of the bounders who hire country houses and exploit any damn man who's inflicted with a title. Get away, and see things and come up against actualities. Nothing like travel and rubbin' shoulders with all the foreign Jacks, Toms and Harrys, to wear off the stucco of our tin-pot kind of life here. It's done me all manner of good. Why, I can be taken for a bushman any day, and I'm mighty proud of that! Besides, I don't see that there's anything better for you to do, old man. You haven't got enough income to do yourself well—yachtin', I mean, and all that —and there's no earthly way under the system of your bein' able to make a bit. What d'yer know? What have

they ever taught you that's useful? You can go into Parliament, of course. But, then, any fool can do that, and it's an utter waste of time. Besides, you'd only be another laughing-stock for the Press to jibe at, because you wear decent clothes and keep your hair brushed. I wish *I* were in your shoes. I wish *I* were a lucky devil of a second son. England would only see me about once in three years, and then only for a week or two."

His flow of words came to an end because he had to light his pipe. And so Clive got in a word, a good many words, and while he told George of his meeting with Helena at Dover and what it meant to them, the big man's fair, brick-red face was a study in expressions. Amusement and incredulity were followed by sympathy and a touch of excitement. When Clive finally came to an end it was with the reiterated question: "What am I to do?"

George sat ruminating for some minutes, puffing out clouds of smoke. Sitting in that medieval room in his shirt-sleeves, so muscular and hard and fit, he seemed to Clive to typify the attitude of the age in which they lived; he seemed to represent in his large, strong body the figure of democracy in a place that had lingered on long after its time. And although his emotions were all alight and all his interest was centred, naturally enough, on himself in this crisis in his life; he couldn't help wondering what attitude his brother would take up, and whether his advice would be that of the man of the world belonging to an effete class or of the simple, nature-loving man who stood by old laws and old faiths and old puritanism.

"I don't think, old boy," he said slowly, "that there is anything for you to do but get away."

In Clive's disappointment there was an unwilling touch of gladness. This was dear old George indeed! "You mean leave the country?"

"That's what I mean, yes. Put the sea between that girl and yourself as soon as you can. That's my advice."

But Clive made a struggle. "Why, she's married to a man who's not her husband. He's old enough to be her father and he's ill. His health has utterly broken down. He's an incurable invalid through his debaucheries. The thing's too monstrous to think about calmly."

George puffed out another cloud. "Yes, but so are a whole lot of things, old lad. That's no excuse. She was right when she asked you to let her go home. I'd like to know that girl. She's—different. You say she's married to the wrong man? Well, but so are many women. If you bolt with her, you put her through the divorce-court, always supposin' that Harwich frees her, and her name and photograph go into every pot-house in the country. Another admirable peg on which the Radicals may hang a diatribe. 'Lord Clive Hurbert runs off with the young Duchess of Harwich, leaving the Duke on a bed of sickness.' You can't do it, my dear fellow, apart from all the other reasons, and there are many. I'm old-fashioned, perhaps. In fact, I know I am. I've got to be. Otherwise I should chuck all my responsibilities, or marry Edith for her money and go elsewhere for my fun."

He got up. In the dim light of the candles he looked bigger and taller and more massive than he was, and with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up and the tan of sun and air on his face and arms he seemed to represent simplicity, and honesty and manliness.

"Leave that good girl alone, Clive," he said. "She's too straight to tamper with, old man, and God knows it's time we showed some of these plain men of to-day that we don't all hang about stage-doors and play hankey with the decencies. I don't know anything about love, but if it's what it's made out to be, it's something to keep very clean and fine. Straighten your back, old lad. Let's prove, you and I, that if we can't stick on feathered hats and swords, and go out to fight like maniacs who have no

fear of man or beast or death, we can at least be gentlemen and play the good old game for all we're worth, eh?"

An hour later, when Clive was alone, awfully and appallingly alone, he moved away from the place where he had remained standing after his elder brother had left him, and went over to one of the narrow windows. Under the soft, mysterious glamour of a full moon the old, stately park seemed to be quietly sleeping, in the beauty that goes with ripe age. The gnarled branches of the oaks and beeches, all covered with young leaves, their latest children, were moveless and silent, cut in silhouette against a sky cloudless and pinked with stars. About the old, rather grim mansion there was the glamour of an unpurchasable history, the splendid, quiet dignity that settles itself upon all landmarks. Clive thought of it as a lighthouse too solid and duty-determined to be beaten down by the turbulent, insensate waves that flung themselves at its base with a sort of resentful jealousy—a desire to destroy.

George's unliterary, ill-finished but unmistakable words rang in his head. In spite of all arguments, however cunning and eloquent, in spite of the apparent cruelty and injustice of fate, in spite of the label that had been attached to him and his class, who for the most part made little effort to unlive it, he did stand for something, he ought, more than other, ruder men, to set, if he could, some example. It was all quite clear. He had thought himself to be the master of his fate, the captain of his soul. He was not. No man is. And when, finally, he went to a sleepless bed, it was with renewed determination to fight against hereditary instincts and an uninspired schooling and play straight.

The Miracle of Love

VI

TO explain the unexplainable has been the hobby and the profession of ten per cent. of the population of the world since Adam delved and Eve span. Mystics, witches, fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, spiritualists, scientists, astrologers, clergymen and doctors—they have all been at work for ages, some honestly, some as charlatans, some with all the fire and fervour of fanaticism. These three classes of explainers are as busy as ever, and their new names for old mysteries make their appearance with the regularity of clockwork.

If Helena, Duchess of Harwich, had arrived at middle age, and had, in consequence, fallen into the bad habit of reading about "New Thought," of sitting at the feet of New Religionists, had dabbled in Christian Science, and had made a protégée of one of the numerous glib and enigmatical females who practise the arts of crystal-gazing and spirit-raising, she might have found a high-sounding, meaningless word for something that happened to her three days after she had left Clive standing outside Victoria Station.

She had been up all night, for three nights, in that great, echoing house called Cardinals. She had turned herself into a nurse, and had sat in the room of the stricken man who was her husband only by the laws of the Church and State, and who now, a victim to the terrible disease of creeping paralysis, was less husband than ever. Many women would have done what she was doing under the same circumstances, but not one man in ten thousand. She had returned to the man for whom she had no affection and no respect all burning and tingling with her love for Clive. She had come back almost unnaturally free from the horrid spirit of martyrdom, which makes people do half-heartedly that which they

detest doing for no other reason than that they may be rewarded hereafter, or earn a sham reputation for angelicism here below. She had returned to her prison when she might have gone away to paradise, solely because she wanted to keep her love high and beautiful and unspoiled. And so, although she had done nothing to her discredit, nothing actually which the ill man could ask her to pay for, she was devoting herself utterly to the husband who had frightened and nauseated her and almost spoilt her outlook on life at its real beginning. It was her feminine method for punishing herself for having discovered a longed-for happiness when she had jeopardized her right to enjoy it.

The fact, too, that her determined attendance upon the unnoticing man was unnecessary, because the night nurse sat quietly at his side, made no difference, except perhaps to strengthen her determination. Her body was in her husband's room, but her spirit was in Clive's. And all these enforced hours of sleeplessness, and everything that she did during them to help the nurse who wished for none, were given and done not for her husband, but for Clive. She would have had very little pity for her husband but for Clive. It was for Clive, for the idea of Clive, in thankfulness for having met Clive and for his love that she scourged herself. They are women worth winning who do this thing.

It was when she went into her boudoir, so tired that she could only stand quite still with wide, pricking eyes and wonder whether days of sleep would ever make her fresh again, that it happened. Her daily batch of letters, a curious, heterogeneous mixture from professional beggars and hospitals, tradespeople announcing sales or rendering accounts, and acquaintances, who asked her to their houses in order to get the advertisement of her name, was lying on her writing-table. She had never had a letter from Clive. Without noticing, or wishing to see,

the pile, she was drawn suddenly across the room. Scattering it here and there, she put her hand unerringly on one, the handwriting on which she had never seen before, and held it to her lips with a little passionate cry. When she opened it, it ended with "Clive," and began with "Beloved." This peculiar, unaccountable knowledge may have had any one of a dozen high-falutin' names. Helena called it love.

She didn't read it at once. It was too good, too unexpected. She said to herself that she would save it until she had had a bath and was comfortable, and then enjoy it slowly and sleep, because it would lie on the pillow under her cheek. And so that no one should break into the wonder of this spirit meeting, she told her maid that she would do without her and put herself to bed.

No longer tired and drawn, and with a look of almost maternal beauty on her young, sweet face this girl hurried through her bath, with a song in her heart and the letter placed so that she could see it. Every word that Clive had said to her and all that he had not, at first, dared to say, came back to her memory. Every look and gesture that he had given, the sudden boyish charm of his smile, the sudden blackness of his eyes, the little way he had of hitching his shoulder, the tilt of his chin when he swung easily along, the unconscious note of authority in his voice when he asked for things, the innate courtesy with which he treated the person who carried out his wishes, the strength and tenderness of his grasp, the passion of his kisses—she went over them all again proudly, with a sense of possession.

And then, sitting up in bed, with her long mane of golden hair tied with a ribbon and the exquisite paleness of her flesh gleaming through her thin nightgown, she read Clive's first letter. It was very young and naïve and earnest and uncontrolled.

"Beloved" (he wrote) "I love you. I love you. There hasn't been one minute of the day and night since I saw you drive away from that cursed station that I haven't ached for the want of you, just to see and listen to and watch. I'd give all my hopes of heaven and twenty years of my life if you had been free and we could have gone away together. What are we going to do? How are we going to stand being separated? Day after day goes by here and I'm just a husk of a man, because my heart and soul and spirit are with you. I listen to the dear old mother and my aunt, who's one of the very best, and hear nothing but your voice. Everywhere I look I can see your eyes and face, and the scent of you comes over me in great waves that make me giddy and drugged with love and the need to touch you. I get up every morning with my eyes towards the station, and I'm held back, tied, pinned down, because I know that if I go I must, *must* take you away." . . .

And on and on it ran, an intimate outpouring of great love, an unbearing of a soul lifted up and inspired by the high and splendid, normal passion of a man's overwhelming desire, filled with cleanness and the big urgencies of youth, lighted up here and there with ecstasy, touched now and again with something a little laughable in its inarticulate attempt at expression, but thrilling and throbbing in every line and word with truth and a magnificent sincerity. It summed up briefly the talks with Lady Emily and George, and wound up with a simple, brave assurance that he would do his best to live up to her now and for ever.

The end was the beginning repeated in different words:

"I love, I love you. Wherever you are you are mine and I am yours. I know nothing about re-incarnation, but I know that this is not the first time that you and I

have loved, because you have always been in my life, and I have been waiting and killing time till I met you again. What does that mean except that we have lived and loved in some other time, in some other life? I love you again, still, more than ever, and I shall love you till death and after.

"CLIVE."

And with these good sheets pulsing beneath her cheek, the girl who had not been allowed to wait for her true man fell asleep with a smile on her lips and tears on her face.

VII

CAPTAIN The Honourable Evelyn Granby Harling, third son of Lord Whippingham, married Eleanor, eldest daughter of Field-Marshal Viscount Wooburn, and had Helena, afterwards Duchess of Harwich, for a daughter. He was known in all the hunting districts of England as "dear old Evelyn." He was as popular among his own class and set—which frequently was not made up of any members of his own class—as among huntsmen, racing touts, stable-boys and bookmakers. His likability not only opened all hearts, but many bank accounts. His delightful, hail-fellow manners, irresistible geniality and optimism, his don't-care-a-hang pluck and utter disregard for his skin, would have in themselves been sufficient to have established his universal nickname. But they went, also, with so frank an eye, a face and figure so uniquely good to see and a sympathy so ready and sincere that, like the great artist or writer who wins the right to drop his Christian name, he lost the need, even as a boy, of the surname of his father. In debt to young friends and tradesmen while at school, he established the easy habit at Sandhurst, and made an art

of it in his regiment. Although his allowance was larger than that of any of his brother officers, he only had a small sum to bless himself with after he had borrowed it from a more careful or scrupulous friend. He paid this one back by borrowing a larger sum from another, keeping the difference for immediate use. But for the fact that he was a sportsman, a charming companion and a man who professed, with a burst of laughter, to be devoid of the money sense, he would have been put down as an unscrupulous and shifty person and avoided. His greatest self-indulgence took the form of promiscuous entertaining, and his only open vice was gambling. He meant well. He had good and generous instincts, but he had an almost uncanny gift for finding admirable reasons for not putting them into practice if, by doing so, he placed himself to the slightest inconvenience. He was a very brilliant man, capable of becoming a master of any subject upon which he concentrated. But he had only to set his mind upon a thing inevitably and immediately to fly off at a tangent. Supposing that he took up rifle-shooting, one had only to meet him a week later to find him immersed in writing a novel. Barely begun, this great work was put aside—temporarily, of course, quite temporarily—for fly-fishing. And so it went on. He ran the gamut of possible pursuits and was an expert in none. At the moment when he had never been in debt so heavily in his life, he left the service, universally regretted, took a delightful house in one of the best streets in Mayfair, almost rebuilt it to his taste, furnished it on credit, and conducted his bride there with a characteristic touch of Raleighism that re-won her heart. He was really very fond of her and she had a nice income. He then adopted, to use his own phrase, a financial career. That is to say, he became a director of several adventurous companies in the City, driving to one or other of his offices every other day in a private hansom cab, dressed immaculately.

While in this atmosphere of men acuter and far more unscrupulous than himself, he gambled away every farthing of his wife's private income, always being "in on the ground-floor, dearest," and managed with extraordinary success to lose large sums belonging to those of his many relatives who believed his enthusiastic and quite sincere statements that he could double their money for them as easily as saying knife. After a time that was the one word which found no place in the dictionaries of all these gullible people. "Dear old Evelyn" remained, nevertheless, a frequent visitor to shoot their birds.

How he managed to live out of gaol in various charming quarters of London, entertain his friends extremely well, show up constantly at the races, remain a member of three of the most select clubs in England, wear inimitable clothes and spend long holidays abroad, no one knew or could guess. The secret was never discovered even by his devoted, admiring and frequently deserted wife. He talked about "my luck, dear old fellow, my extraordinary luck," and perhaps it will be kind to allow that word to stand in place of one far less euphonious and more applicable.

It was this luck of his that brought about the marriage of his young and only daughter, the apple of his eye, with a bosom friend who had just succeeded to the title and immense income of the Duke of Harwich. Putting it with hideous plainness, he sold his little girl for thirty thousand pounds, with which he retired to a pleasant corner of the Isle of Wight, there to examine the occasional tramp steamer through the telescope of the club, play bridge with other men who were on the shelf, and talk well and epigrammatically about the good old days. To the surprise of those few men of his acquaintance who had some psychology, he took his dear *laissez-faire,* talkative, untidy wife with him, and as she told him the plots of all the latest novels with much detail and some

literary humour and sarcasm, she served a useful purpose. He detested reading.

The one mystery in life that he had never solved was how Helena came to be the blessing of his union with "the Missus." And that was also a matter of complete surprise and infinite disappointment to the man who thought that she would be worth thirty thousand pounds to him.

Harwich would have sold her at the greatly reduced, summer-sales price of thirty shillings before the end of the honeymoon.

VIII

IN the life of one of Oliver Bellendine, Duke of Harwich's not too remote ancestors there must have been an Oriental episode. Within memory and as proved by the family pictures in Harwich House, the Bellendines were a fair, blue-eyed, red-skinned race, the women freckled, the men pleasantly tanned. They were pure Saxon in appearance as well as in temperament. Round, ingenuous faces, broad shoulders, big hands and feet, and a tendency to run early to fat, came down from generation to generation. An honest, easily satisfied, nature-loving breed, their history, peculiar among that of all other great English families, was monotonously free from scoundrelism, the selling of swords to the highest bidder or marriage with actresses who had been kings' favourites. Oliver Bellendine was, however, a throwback in appearance and by nature. He was the eldest son of the eldest brother of the late Duke of Harwich, who died unmarried. His mother also was a Bellendine, a second cousin, true to type. And when as a little boy Oliver came suddenly on his parents, with his sallow skin, black, sleek hair, large, olive-shaped eyes, and a curious lissome gracefulness, they both wondered, with a distinctly un-

easy feeling, to which dead member of the family this freakishness was due.

Poor lad! Made to suffer from childhood for a skin with which he had nothing to do—his father disliked him openly, his mother could never bring herself to love him as she loved the rest of her numerous family; the very nurses eyed him surreptitiously, and his governess, the daughter of the local vicar, early set herself to work to make him pay for the indiscretion that had all too obviously been perpetrated by one of the women members of his family in the direct line; he was the ugly duckling. He was odd man out. He looked, among his fair-haired, blue-eyed, big-limbed brothers and sisters, like a foreigner who had come to stay. His nickname at Eton was Rajah. It followed him into his family and into, eventually, his regiment. How apt it was young Evelyn Harling, who invented it, was of course unaware then. But when afterwards the two young men hunted in couples, its aptness was conspicuous. Oliver Bellendine was Oriental in all his methods. His sudden black rages, his subtle cruelty to those of his school-fellows and brother officers who jarred his susceptibilities, his utter lack of consideration towards his servants and his animals—he treated them alike—and his appalling, insatiable sensualism were all wholly Oriental. So also was his sense of colour, his passion for the sun, his superstition and his amazing horsemanship.

Never tall, his apparent delicacy hid an extraordinary wiriness and steel-like strength. With his small, regular features and oval face, a black moustache curled away from his lip, and large, regular, very white teeth, his tall, slight, well-built figure and his habit of falling into graceful attitudes, he was a distinguished person, noticeable everywhere. Men called him supercilious and treated him with some carefulness, being instinctively aware of his strength and his biting sarcasm. In a reluc-

tant way they admired him, too, because anything that he took the trouble to do he did to perfection. His polo was renowned. He played the piano like a first-rate professional. As an after-dinner speaker he had few rivals. Women, on the other hand, found him handsome and intensely interesting. His courteous insolence piqued their curiosity. They were a little afraid of him, and for that reason enjoyed the excitement of being alone with him. He was, naturally, a fine dancer.

He had two hobbies—silver and women. The first had to be old, the second fair, and he hunted and paid for both with the assiduity and recklessness of a true collector. His one man friend was dear old Evelyn. He liked Harling and kept him in close touch, not only because he amused him, but because he was useful. He knew Harling through and through. He lent him money frequently in order that he might make use of his unscrupulousness. All doors opened to dear old Evelyn, and the Rajah followed him through just so many as he cared to enter. The stage-door was the one which interested him most. Young girls could be collected there more easily than anywhere else.

He left his regiment when Harling gave up soldiering and went around the world. He was away five years from England. Three of them he spent in India, staying mostly with Prince Kumpathalia. He returned on the death of his father, and as the Duke of Harwich made several valuable and even epoch-making speeches in the House of Lords on British rule in India. A rich man, and a Duke, and still in the early thirties, he became one of the most eligible *partis* in England. His reputation, well known, did not stand in the way of mothers eager to do well by their young debutante daughters. He remained unmarried, however, disappearing regularly from society in eager pursuit of one or other of his hobbies. As years went by people began to talk about him

under their breath, and he became the *pièce de résistance* of those papers which live from hand to mouth by serving up delectable morsels of pornography to a neurotic and unhealthy public.

At forty-three, with a doctor in constant attendance, he settled down in the family place in Sussex, oddly called Cardinals, broken in health. For a time he saw no one, taking no part in the affairs of the county; and then, one fine afternoon, Harling drove over from a neighbouring house, and was welcomed with something as near enthusiasm as the Rajah ever got. It so happened that Helena was with her father, and at the sight of her slim, sweet, young and golden beauty the collector spirit, sometime dormant, broke out again in the Duke's hot blood. In all his long and varied experience he had never seen a girl who appealed to him so strongly. He asked the Harlings to stay, soon discovered that dear old Evelyn stood, at last, on the very edge of a catastrophe, a financial debacle, and with a sudden tactfulness hitherto absent from his relations with his friend, suggested to him that a good way to re-establish himself would be to become father-in-law to a wealthy man. At first the proposal came as a shock to dear old Evelyn. He respected, admired, and was surprised at his daughter. He found her as much unlike the sophisticated, rather callous young women of the day as a Cosway miniature is unlike a modern coloured photograph. With an uncharacteristic lack of words, he expressed his sense of obligation at the honour, and said that he would consult his wife. He had no intention, however, of doing so. The remains of his breeding that had not been wholly undermined by his constant and habitual shiftiness made the mere idea of handing over his little girl to such a man repellent and horrible. The Duke, with his uncanny intuition, saw this, but waited quietly. It was not necessary to wait long. Harling was threatened with criminal prosecution by a

firm of Bond Street jewellers, for having pawned a diamond necklace bought on credit. The only man who would or could help him to evade social ruin was Harwich. A deal was made, as between friends. The jeweller was satisfied, Harling saw security for the first time for many years, and London read with mixed feelings a paragraph in the *Morning Post:*

> "A marriage has been arranged and will take place immediately between the Duke of Harwich, of Harwich House, St. James's Square, and Cardinals, Sussex, and Helena, only daughter of Capt. the Hon. Evelyn Granby and Mrs. Harling, of 221, Park Street, Mayfair."

The wedding took place one afternoon, very quietly, in St. James's Church, Piccadilly. The fond mother wept a few half-proud, half-frightened tears, the loving father drugged himself into believing that all was for the best with a double dose of the metaphorical pills the prescription for which he used so often, and the Duke and Duchess of Harwich left for the Continent.

In Helena's memory, as she sat in a first-class carriage on the boat train with the quiet, dark, distinguished man, whose carefully-brushed hair was almost white at the temples, and in whose persistent eyes there was the admiration of the collector, was the perfectly vivid remembrance of her father's still charming figure, bent and stooping before her, the sight of tears upon his face, the sound of a broken, appealing voice and a story of moral and social ruin which made her heart turn cold.

The Miracle of Love

IX

HELENA went away a girl and by the grace of God came back a girl. It would have been inconceivable had not all the angels made a network of their wings for her protection. They drove from the Gare du Nord to the little, dignified, exquisite Hôtel de Crillon in the corner of the Place de la Concorde. It was a warm June evening, and a golden sun was slowly setting. Its glamour lay over the wide Place, where even in these peaceful times the hypersensitive eye can always replace the tumbrils, the shouting, blood-drunken *sansculottes* and the isolated, graceful figures of contemptuous aristocrats. Along the edge of the green-laden Bois a line of one-horse fiacres was standing, with their fat drivers in the inconceivable attitudes of temporary comfort that seem to be uniquely French. The gleam of white-dressed nurse-maids, the glint of scarlet trousers, the hard brilliance of geraniums, the heterogeneous colours of women's frocks gratified the eye among the trees. The wide road between them, polished to apparent heat, looked like a huge parting in a flat Brobdingnagian head. Automobiles skimmed round corners, some silently, some with the rattle of old iron, and taxi-autos, jagged and throttled by brutal hands, dodged like *gamins* in and out. Flags serpented in the light breeze above famous buildings and shadows flung across the square lengthened slowly.

As Helena drove up, the peculiar essence and aroma of Paris, the delightful Latinism of the people, which makes them move as though to a tune and greet each other as though quarrelling, and call their evening papers as though in the last ecstasy of hideous pain; the clashing, merry colours of advertisements and kiosks and uniforms sent its inevitable thrill of exhilaration through her. Life

there seemed to be unforced and natural. Men and women were not ashamed to show that they were either in high spirits or the very depths of despondency, and in the ebullience of their childlike expression of both moods there was something unexplainably comic. The very air might have been refreshed by the tincture of ripe grapes, and all the houses painted in the dark by midnight bands of wild art students, half drunk with life.

It was new and not a little pleasing to be received by a bearded man in uniform, whose back was bent bowwise and whose murmur of welcome was profoundly deferential. M'ssieur et M'dame le Duc et Duchesse d' 'arrich had the beautiful suite above the portico. The scent of roses met Helena as she followed in the gymnastic boy, who was very willing, by every eloquent though unspoken assurance, to turn a header or eat the soap, elegant wrapper and all, but that he might have the inexpressible happiness to provide her with amusement. He made an art of putting down her jewel-case. He treated it as though it were filled with the precious eggs of a hitherto undiscovered bird of paradise. He opened doors fearlessly, but turned with an agony of apprehension lest the appearance of the room displeased. He let blinds go up with a bang, and pulled them half-way down again to show that they were, if it came to that, capable of silence. He glanced tenderly at the delicate bed in Helena's room, where stood an anxious maid, and with bravado at that of the Duke in his, where the valet looked as though he were about to give an exhibition of Swedish drill by touching the carpet with the crown of his head without the assistance of either hands or nose.

Couleur de rose was the prevailing note both in the decoration of the rooms and the reception of its enchanted attendants. And when at last the boy forced himself away, it was with an inarticulate murmur of devotion, admiration, respect and friendship that showed

an anxiety for, if necessary, death, and always, in the meantime, for intense physical exertion.

But the smile froze on Helena's young, eager, beautiful face when she caught the olive-shaped, measuring, collector's eyes upon her. She felt as though she were being watched by an unspeakable spy through a slit in a bathing tent. She went as cold as stone.

"You look as fresh as a lily gleaming with the dew," he said, with the smiling self-consciousness of the man who translates an appropriate line from a foreign poet. He himself had never looked more un-English. "Will you have some tea?"

"No, thanks," said Helena, wishing that she had the courage to call the boy back.

"Dinner at seven-thirty, then," he said, "and afterwards . . ."

He finished the sentence silently, and stood for a moment at the door, like a suspended hawk. His eyes closed slowly and he ran his tongue along his lips.

In the little dining-room, under the same florid ceiling where the de Crillons sat before the Revolution, there was a rather more than usually cosmopolitan collection of people, even for Paris in June. Helena was conducted to a small round table between the open windows by a black-headed, sallow-faced Greek. She brought with her, in spite of her efforts, the note that is given by an English wild rose in a bouquet of exotic flowers. When Harwich, extremely carefully groomed, joined her and bent forward with cat-like grace to make some flattering remark, there was not one woman in the room who did not give a little gasp of dismay. Several of them said what they thought in their national degrees of frankness, and one large, alert American woman, with white hair and clear, healthy skin, tapped her dried-up-looking husband on the arm and said: "I would have a law to pre-

vent such a thing as *that.*" Half the room nodded in complete agreement.

If Mrs. Harling or any of Helena's young friends had seen her enter the room at that moment they wouldn't have believed their eyes. They would have asked each other what on earth she had done to herself?—what she had done to take away that air of undoubted virginity, of clean, frank, unself-conscious beauty, almost of unattractiveness that comes of a deliberate training in the prevention of cleverness or charm or allurement—a training that is essentially and wonderfully English, even now. Some new and freakish way in which she had done her hair, a flower pinned with too right a touch of *chic* —something—had, in an instant, put her outside the national type of well-brought-up young English girls as wholly as though she were in fancy dress.

The explanation lay in the fact that Helena, with the memory of the Duke's last look like a piece of mud upon her, had stood in front of her looking-glass for an hour—ten minutes sufficed as a rule—determined, with clenched teeth, to remove from herself whatever it was that attracted that man. She succeeded in making herself just different enough to take all eyes back to her that before would have been contented with one look.

This was the second time that Helena had ever been out of England. It was the first time that she had ever dined alone with a man. Simply owing to the fact that her father and mother were physically and mentally unable to bring up a girl, she had remained at a country vicarage, sharing the little prim, disciplinarian governess with the vicar's daughters, eight miles from a railway station, a hundred and twenty miles from London. She shared the one pony, played tennis and hockey like a boy, went to bed at nine and got up at six. Talk was clean. The boys who played their games were clean. There was too much health about and too many healthy

things to do for any hole-and-corner business. And so Helena was not in any way infected by any of the microbes of the Harling house. This was shut up during the times of her holidays, because dear old Evelyn and the missis were themselves taking holidays at their friends' expense. She caught none of the untidiness, the physical and moral carelessness of her mother, nothing of her father's habit of never lying but of never telling the truth. She heard nothing of the doubtful jokes, the hunting language, the detailed anecdotes of stage and semi-society that were indulged in round the dinner-table. She grew up simple, clean, honest, ingenuous, full of laughter and high spirits, not clever at her lessons, which she frankly hated, but with a lively and alert interest in humanity which took her far more intimately into the cottages than the vicar. She read aloud to bedridden women and men who had met with accidents, doing far more to cheer by her sunny beauty and friendship than by her reading, good as it was. Where the vicar hoped and wished that she would introduce the lukewarm fiction which had passed his wife's able censorship Helena flung Kipling. She was mad about Kipling. "I love him! I love him!" she used to say, and there was hardly a cottage in and around the village of Little Pillar whose inhabitants at some time or other had not been made to tingle or to choke by the enthusiastic delivery of the Master's infallible words. She remained at the vicarage long after most girls finish with schoolbooks. Mother was so glad to know that the good air of the neighbourhood and the good influence of the dear vicar and his wife were building up dear Helena into a nice strong girl, and really, stuffed up in London, what could she do, especially as dear papa's finances were precarious, and she herself hardly ever went out. From every point of view she was better where she was, especially as the vicar, although, of course, poor, never called

dear old Evelyn's attention to the fact that he was several years behind with his cheques. The vicar and his wife loved her like a daughter, and would have been very glad if those peculiar Harlings had forgotten her entire existence. Few things would have given them more joy than to have had her with them always. Sometimes in the night, when there had been good news from Charlie from Oxford, or the final game for the rubber had been almost too exciting, or when, for some reason, sleep came shyly Mrs. Vicar would lie and think with a curious, indefinable anxiety about Helena and her future. As the dear girl had grown up she had noticed with alarm that unconsciously and without the artificial aid of any of the gorgeous rubbish about New Thought, or the harum-scarum assistance of Bernard Shaw, who is interpreted by the young as making love something unspeakably nasty and motherhood a matter for criminal prosecution if accomplished in wedlock, or of Maeterlinck and his vaguely poetic undermining of the old good faith in God and hereafter, she had developed rather more temperament than could eventually make for peace of mind. She had been informed by the servants that Helena had been seen by Lord Sommerton's keepers wandering in the woods on moonlight nights, singing to herself and breaking into little dances and laughing. She had come upon a copy-book in a drawer in Helena's room filled with quaint immature verses about flowers and their children, stars and the songs they sang and the message of the brook. And, without intentional spying or morbid curiosity, she had discovered the existence of another book which sent a pang of alarm into her conventional heart. It was a fat book of many hundred pages, begun when the girl was thirteen, and was made up of love-letters to an obviously imaginary boy. They seemed to Mrs. Vicar to be love-letters, not because they were worded with gush and sentimentality and girlish effervescence of af-

fection, but—far more disturbing—with quiet, intimate confessions of thoughts and feelings, as though written by a wife to her husband, or a woman to her lover. The pieces that she took to play on the piano, too, with strange foreign names, and which began in the middle and ended nowhere, seemed to prove that the dear child, although so delightfully English and normal and out-doory, had dreams by day and night and might be capable, perhaps, of sacrifice, or heroism, or some other such uncomfortable thing. That she had great physical and mental courage, could bear pain and administer to it, needed no proof. Also, it became more and more clear that she possessed a quite uncommon gift of seeing things long before others were aware that they were about, both actually and metaphorically, and could often advise the vicar in a flash on some point upon which it seemed necessary to consult his bishop, his doctor, or his lawyer. One way and another, Mrs. Vicar was, however, "just a little worried, my dear." And now this girl sat at dinner with an Oriental, so much a past-master in the art of love, that he was prematurely old and indescribably undesirable.

To Helena he was something completely new, something a little uncanny and mysterious. He was the head of an English family, while he seemed to be wrong without a bejewelled turban, or a tight-fitting coat of gold and silver cloth. She knew nothing about him. He was almost as much a stranger as the glossy-haired head waiter. He was diametrically the very opposite of any man she had ever met, and of the man she had sometimes imagined that she would marry some day. She had married him, knowing nothing more about marriage than that it had been spoken of by the vicar as a beautiful and serious compact, and in some of her books as the be-all and end-all of a woman's life. To save her father she had done, as he put it, what hundreds of other girls would give their ears to do. She had gathered that he

chose her from among so many, because he loved her. Well, it seemed to her to be a very queer way to love—to sit and look at her incessantly with an occasional remark that seemed to her to be stilted and false. She hated his eyes, which glistened with so many things that frightened her. She hated his delicate, greedy hands and his oval face. She hated his smile, which never travelled farther than his lips, with a momentary display of long white teeth beneath that curled-back jet moustache. She knew what the boys and girls would have called him if he had shown himself on the golf-links at Little Pillar—"poisonous." And he really did seem to her to be poisonous—an exquisitely preserved live snake, which had been taught a series of tricks and was labelled harmless, but which might at any moment dart out a fang and sting to death.

Now that the excitement and haste and the sense of doing something big and fine had worn off, she began more and more plainly and horribly to realize that this was the man whom she must love, honour and obey, to whom she had given herself for reasons duly and clearly set forth. And as she sat and was obliged to watch him peck at his expensive food and drink glass after glass of champagne, and realized that he took no interest in her except as something for which he was saving himself up, a sense of terror came over her that made her want to get up, fling herself at the knees of any one of the women in the room and ask to be "taken away."

After dinner he suggested a drive as it was warm, feeling sure that she would be interested in the really very characteristic sight of the Bois when lighted up. And the way in which Helena dodged his hand as she sprang into the open car filled a young passer-by with a sudden desire to hit.

Smoking a long, thin cigar he leaned back, holding his hat on his knee. He needed no turban and no jewels to

make him a Rajah. He smiled with the touch of excitement of the collector who is presently to judge the beauty of his purchase, having taken off all its wrappers with infinite care and leisure.

It was just as they had passed the many-coloured lights of the Alcazar and were still in earshot of its lilting boulevard music that he flipped her cloak back and touched her white round shoulder with his lips.

It was a quarter to eleven when they re-entered the hotel. The orchestra was playing on the landing outside the dining-room—its first supper tune. It was too early for any of the tables to be occupied. Helena asked to be let off supper and suggested writing letters. The writing-room was not empty—anything to kill time.

The Duke went in, selected a table with a finicky regard to its complete comfort—pens, paper, blotter, the light out of the eyes—and drew back the chair. He bent over her as she sat, and said: "Please give my kindest remembrances to your mother and say that I am very happy." There was nothing patronizing in the hand that suddenly crumpled up hers.

But Helena did not write to her mother. She watched the Duke go to the large round table in the middle of the discreetly charming room and turn over the pages of a paper. She was sure that his apparently carefully-arranged attitude was unconscious, because she already knew him to be a man who regarded the world as empty except when he required the immediate services of one of its necessary creatures. With the strong white light of a tall reading-lamp on his dark face, he seemed to her to look old and delicate, and so frail that a rough push would send him flying. The vicar at the same age had looked like a great, big, grown-up boy, ready and glad to face hard physical exertion and in complete command of men far younger than himself. And now that he was

not near to her he struck her as being curiously detached and aloof and unapproachable and self-contained. It made her feel more and more as though she were little else than a doll, bought by a spoilt and discontented child, that was thrown on the ground as soon as it bored. There was no humanity about this man, nothing ordinary, nothing companionable. He had loaded her with pearls and diamonds, but had never given her a cheery word. He treated her consistently as though she were a princess, but never made any effort to talk to her as though she were young and eager to know of things and places. In his elaborate courtesy he was foreign, and she thought of his far-fetched compliments with impatience—as simply silly. They were in Paris and he and she were in modern clothes, but, for all that, she was possessed of the uncanny notion that they were living a chapter of the "Arabian Nights." Her brain was not able to continue to draw analogies, because her version of those wonderful stories had been prepared for the reading of school-girls. She was, therefore, not aware how sure her intuition was —then.

The letter she wrote was to find a place in the fat book which had given Mrs. Vicar disturbing moments. It was to the man whom she had loved ever since she could remember, but had not yet met. She was telling him, very simply and unaffectedly, of what she had done and why, when Harwich came up and touched her shoulder.

"I am going up, Helena," he said. "Come in not later than half an hour."

The sitting-room of the suite was empty. The electric lights were hidden and sent up a sort of glow from their hiding-place on a level with the top of the door. The windows had been shut and the scent of roses was overpowering. Half a cigarette was burning in a dull silver ash-tray as Helena came up. The smoke went up quite

straightly in a thin bluish column like that from a funeral pile seen from a long way off when there was no breeze. A long, thick, meerschaum cigar-holder, with a narrow band of gold round its middle, lay opulently on the table. If there had been an old companionable briar pipe, ripe with use, in place of that unmanly thing Helena might not have crossed to her bedroom quite so quickly or hurried to shut her door with so nervous a gesture.

The snoozing maid—her own, not the one provided by the hotel—tired and excited after her first crossing of the Channel, did not see her Grace pull up short and fight for her breath as though she had been running. She *had* been running—away from a tremendous desire to escape from the hotel. She had stood for a moment outside the revolving glass doors, beneath the old pillar-supported portico, had made half a dozen rushing steps over the wide pavement towards a taxi-auto on the curb, had stopped short, ashamed of her cowardice, and walked back with a high head and tightly-clasped hands. What had she tried to do? Before the altar she had sworn . . .

The maid woke with a start and got up awkwardly, with a murmur of apology.

"Oh, that's all right, Effie. You must be very tired. You've had a long day."

"Yes, your Grace." She enjoyed saying these words, and had rehearsed them over and over again.

The two girls were about the same age. They were both country girls. Effie's parents, unlike the Harlings, were honest, hard-working people. To her there was all the wonderful romance in this ducal marriage of which she had loved to read in her tuppence-coloured assortment of fiction. She would gladly have changed places with the fair-haired girl who seemed so queerly unimpressed. The word "position" dazzled her. It is a word

that has the same effect on town as well as country people.

"Shall I prepare your Grace's bath?"

"No, not yet," said Helena, "unless you're in a hurry to go to bed. It isn't really late, you know." She let the girl unfasten her frock—it was a new sensation to be maided—and put her into a short silk *négligé*. Then she sat down at the dressing-table, on which one or two of her own simple things looked very self-conscious among the Duke's golden presents.

Effie took out the combs and a mane of golden hair was let loose. "My!" she cried involuntarily.

The note of friendliness and honestly-expressed admiration came upon Helena like a touch of the sun after a day spent in a large marble museum, artificially lighted and warmed. She laughed. "It's so long," she said, "that it's a perfect pest to do nicely. I've always wished that I had that short curly stuff that stays where it's put and doesn't get into tangles at night. Is yours long?"

Effie made a little face. "It would abin, only that I had measles so bad when I was eight. Funny, how measles fags you out, isn't it?" She was combing the hair and enjoying it. "My sister had 'em at the same time, and although it didn't do nothing to her hair, it sort of settled in her ears. She's not what you call deaf, not really, but when she gets run down or her young man doesn't write, it comes on at once, and you have to shout at her like a storm at sea."

"What would happen if her young man deserted her?"

"She'd go as deaf as a post, for certain."

The two girls laughed.

The little burr in Effie's voice had taken Helena out of Paris to the vicarage.

A door was opened noiselessly and a quiet voice brought her back again. "Why does my nightingale only sing at night?"

Helena sat up very straight. "I didn't know you had a nightingale," she said. She detested this simply silly talk, and tried not to look at the black man, as she inwardly called him at the moment, who smiled at her. His dressing-gown was made of some soft Eastern stuff, all white and gold and silver, and his slippers were red morocco and heelless.

"I think that we will dispense with the maid," he said. He met the astonished girl's eyes and with his own led her to the door. Then he sat down in the most comfortable chair and took out a thin gold cigarette-case. "Will you allow me?" he asked, and lit his cigarette.

Helena, with her hair in a long, virginal plait, tied with a piece of ribbon, sat frozen.

"What a merry laugh that young woman has!" said Harwich. "But don't let me hold you back."

She felt his eyes examining her, and pulled her *négligé* closer.

"As soon as you are ready I will turn on your bath," he added, and leaned back, with a little catch in his breath.

Suddenly Helena stood up and faced him. "What is it? Why are you here like this? Why have you sent my maid away?"

"I wished to do so," he said, with a flick of his eyelashes.

"That isn't enough."

"I think so."

"I don't."

"You had better begin to think so at once, dear child."

"But . . . I'm English. I don't understand," she faltered. What words could she use to this man who was so curious and observant.

He spoke quietly but with decision, letting cigarette smoke curl out of his nose. "You are my wife and this

room is therefore mine at all times. If it gives me pleasure to sit here . . ."

Helena cried out. "It isn't . . . possible! It isn't . . ."

He laughed a little. He was really very entertained. The girl was English, from the country. She had had to be made his wife. "Come! Come! Don't be Victorian. You can't get over the fact that we have to-day stood hand in hand at the altar. . . ."

"No, I can't."

"Then . . .?" He held out both hands, between the fingers of one of which smoke dribbled. It was the gesture of an Arabian carpet merchant arguing prices, cross-legged.

It gave Helena words, blazing words of scornful anger and indignation. "I see," she said. "You are going to sit there, the man who has bought a slave, and watch and look at me—judge me! . . ."

"But of course!" he said. "Why not? I think that I shall be more than satisfied, dear child."

Helena went to the dressing-table. With quick, shaking hands she pinned her hair in a thick cable round her head, went into the sitting-room and flung open the window.

After a little while the gentle, insistent voice came again. "Very well, dear child. We will try again to-morrow night. Sleep well."

Her bedroom door closed. An aroma of cigarette cloyed the air.

There was a tap on the door. Effie went to see what it was. The sun was pouring into the room. The Duke's man held out a superb bunch of red roses.

"His Grace desires me to say that he is ready to go down to breakfast at any moment that her Grace wishes to do so."

"Very good," said Effie, and turned.

Helena nodded. She was dressed, and had been looking at the full-length reflection of herself doubtfully in one of Paquin's so-called simple frocks which the Duke had desired her—he was almost royal in the way in which he merely desired—to get. It was so different from any of the locally-made frocks that she had hitherto always worn—the short, rough, country skirts, or her evening things, white and high-waisted, a little open at the neck. She and Effie had taken some time to discover how it fastened.

She took the roses and held them at arm's-length. "They're very lovely," she said, "but somehow not so . . . friendly as English roses."

"No, your Grace."

She gave them back to the maid. "Do something with them, Effie. Put them in your own room, or give them away, please."

And so Effie swallowed her remonstrance.

Helena found Harwich sitting at the little spindle-legged writing-table, blotting an envelope. He had written several letters. He got up and held out his hand. "I hope you are less tired than you were last night," he said, in a more human tone than he had used hitherto. "Are you ready for breakfast?"

"Very hungry," she said, smiling, and glad to smile.

This was so much better than a pedantic compliment, and the sun was shining and she was young. And, after all, little as she believed it possible, with her door not locked, she had slept dreamlessly till Effie came to call her.

From the window by their table there was a superb view of the place. The city was all alive, in full enjoyment of the sun. Helena's spirits rose as she watched and listened. Everything seemed so normal, so clean and so fresh. There was a nice breeze turning all the leaves

in the Bois. A company of short sturdy infantry with baggy red trousers went by with quick jerky movements. Traffic of every description made shifting patterns.

Even the Duke seemed more normal and ordinary, and there was a smile in his eyes.

"Is yours the tourist mind?" he asked. "Do you want to do the whole round of famous buildings, guide-book in hand, go in and out of Notre Dame and the Madeleine, talk easy Napoliana while gazing at the Luxembourg, have *déjeuner* at the Café Voltaire, and spend the afternoon at the Salon, putting crosses against the names of pictures in the catalogue?"

"I think so," said Helena. "If it won't bore you too much."

"I have never permitted myself to be bored yet. It will come as a new experience. But before we go sight-seeing I want to take you round to Dubosc's. They are holding something for me there."

Breakfast came.

Afterwards they drove to the famous jeweller's, in which all the men looked like diplomats. The something was a big black pearl attached to a delicate platinum chain which had been polished by them. It lay, almost ugly to Helena's eyes, in a bed of white satin. She went rather cold as she wondered, looking at the Duke's dark skin, whether he wore this wicked pear-shaped thing round his forehead in secret moments, or worked some unhealthy Arabian tricks with it, having chanted incantations.

One of the men expressed his admiration, and the Duke replied in fluent French that, so far as he was concerned, it only served a purpose when it hung between two virgin breasts. And the man made an eloquent gesture of entire agreement with his expressive hands.

The day was a good one. The Duke played guide, and Helena was surprised and kept on the qui-vive by his

mixture of an intimate knowledge of history and the cynical wit with which he placed it before her. They rolled from place to place in the large, silent car, crossing the river to lunch at the old café whose greedy little eyes gazed continually at the cold Odéon with twinkling affection and gamin respect.

During these hours Harwich assumed a sort of boyishness. He seemed to be endeavouring to take on the outlook and manner of speech of the average, healthy, high-spirited undergraduate. He succeeded so well that Helena almost forgot that she had thought of him as the black man. She was not old enough nor experienced enough to see that he was living down to what he considered to be her level of intelligence. She did not find herself liking him any better. She merely felt less uncomfortable, less observed, less conscious that she was under the microscope of a confirmed sensualist. And she became natural and at ease, and was able to enjoy and for a time forget. With the cat-like quality which belongs to every average woman she was glad at last to return to the hotel and be among her things again, with the friendly Effie, whose deference came in fits and starts. Already the bedroom was home. It was, at any rate, hers, wherein she could be alone with the white girl, whose country burr and soap-shiny face were so essentially English and in keeping with her ideas and upbringing. She had long ago forgotten the existence of the black pearl, to possess which many women would have bartered their bodies without a tremor.

Tea was sent up to her—English tea in the French manner. And she and Effie sat in the window together, knee to knee, watching, commenting and laughing. It was delightful to see the life of a foreign city and listen to the familiar story of one who might easily have been one of the vicar's Sunday-school girls. The whole thing still seemed like a curious dream, and she herself like the

girl in a story. She thanked God fervently from time to time that, at any rate, she had been spared so far, and she refused to allow herself to think of the Duke's final sentence before he had left her room the night before.

There was, too, all the excitement of wearing another new frock for dinner and wondering whether she couldn't devise a new way of doing her hair.

The Duke took her to the opera after dinner, and the sight of the large building, whose tiers were closely filled with people, glistening and scintillating when the lights were up, was as new and wonderful as the soul-stirring music of *La Bohême*. But, oddly enough, Effie's involuntary exclamation, uttered in a tone of awestruck sincerity, when she had stood ready to join the Duke in the sitting-room, seemed to fit into the music with ghastly reiteration. "My! you *are* lucky!" Lucky! . . . When the only man of whom she thought, to whom she wrote, who had walked in step with her through her simple, healthy years, could now be nothing but a friend! Suppose she met him one day soon, or any day, any time—now. She had no shadow of doubt but that he lived and was waiting for her. She had never had any doubt about that. She knew him. She could describe him in detail. His very mannerisms were as familiar as though he and she had been brought up together. She had always been able to bring him to her side in times when there was something on her soul—pain, if she had been hurt by a hasty unjust word, or great joy brought by an indescribably beautiful sunset. There was nothing in her life or in her thoughts that she had not necessarily confided to him. She was his. Their spirits had met and loved.

They walked home.

The Duke had put off his assumption of young-mannishness. He was once more the rather tired, satiated, steelly-composed autocrat, who had done everything, tried

everything, and was quietly on the look-out for a new sensation, a new experience, without very much hope of finding it.

"Poor Paris!" he said suddenly. "She is like a beautiful virtuous woman who has lived with noble courage through a series of chequered years and several drastic operations, and who, being none too well-off, is obliged to adopt the paint and the patchouli of a woman of easy virtue, so that she may attract the paying male guest to her boarding-house. She is called gay, and knowing that the term is an asset to her business—her *clientèle* is altogether composed of the sightseers of other nations, eager for the pornography in which they cannot openly indulge in their own—she kicks her heels about in a skimpy skirt, and stays up until the shadows grow deep about her eyes. And all the while she is honest, industrious and thrifty, and her children are hard-working, kindly, light-hearted people, who, realizing her earning capacity, turn their heads away from her enforced antics. I feel more and more sorry for Paris."

It was an unexpected sentiment from such a man.

Without saying "good-night," he went straight to his bedroom, ordering a cup of black coffee to be brought there.

Deeply relieved, Helena lingered only for a few minutes in the sitting-room, listening and waiting. Effie, who found loneliness in strange surroundings very trying, welcomed her eagerly, and the two talked in undertones. It was a little pathetic—this way in which the two country girls looked to each other for the human note, the trifling, everyday interchange of thoughts and ideas, so far away from their own unexciting and normal surroundings.

"When we leave Paris, where do we go, your Grace?" asked Effie, when having made the young Duchess ready for bed, she lingered, unwilling to return to her little room at the end of a long passage.

"I don't know, Effie."

"Don't you, Miss?" The word, which slipped out, was unnoticed by both. "More foreign cities?"

"I haven't any more idea than you have," said Helena.

"William said he thought his Grace meant to get back to Cardinals as soon as possible because of his doctor. Do you think we shall?"

"We may. I haven't heard."

"Fancy!" said Effie.

Neither knew why, but simultaneously they moved together and put their arms round each other.

When Helena was alone she put on a dressing-gown, picked up one of the new novels that Harwich had bought for her before the train left Victoria, and sat down under the light.

She opened it and read the first few pages. It didn't seem to her to matter very much. It was all about the way in which a man with round shoulders and the knees of his trousers bagged opened a linen-draper's shop in a side street in Surbiton. The conscious word-play of the writer's description made her think of an entertainer in ill-fitting evening clothes whom she had seen at a country circus balancing a billiard ball on the end of a cue.

She heard her door open with a catch at her heart.

The Duke was not undressed. He was smoking the inevitable cigarette in a long thin holder. In his hand he carried a little black case that Helena seemed to remember having seen before.

He opened it and dangled the black pearl by its chain. "This was given to me by Prince Kumpathalia. It has never been worn, so he said, by a woman. At any rate, I have never seen it on one." He went over and dropped it into her lap. "You are so white," he added. "I have a fancy to see it on you."

He drew back, smiling, and sat on the arm of a chair

in the corner of the room. It was as though he had withdrawn to a seat some little distance from a stage in order that he might obtain a better perspective.

Helena left it in the folds of her kimono. "I'm most awfully sorry," she said, with a broader touch of her blunt outdoor manner than usual, "but I don't like the thing."

"Anyone would think that you imagine it bites."

"It may do, for all I know. It looks to me—unhealthy." She laughed a little, but she meant what she said and felt that she had to say it.

"I suppose you don't know what that's worth?" asked Harwich, not very much amused.

"No. I haven't any idea about the value of these things. Why? Is it something very fabulous?"

"No, not fabulous." He threw the end of his cigarette into an ash-tray. "If your father had had it its price would have settled his recent little trouble quite easily and left him enough over to buy something for himself."

He had meant to be cruel. He saw the blood flame in her face with satisfaction. He disliked the steady maintenance of the vicarage atmosphere in his temporary house. It led to argument.

"It is yours," he said, "with my love."

There was no humbleness in her short "Thank you." He expected humbleness. . . . Um! This child had temperament. But, for all that, she was of the type of beautiful English virgin. He took the chair and started another cigarette, as who should say: "I intend to see this through."

"You will put it on, won't you?" he said.

She did—over her kimono.

"Oh, but no! Worn like that it might as well be a big early Victorian brooch."

"How *am* I to wear it?" asked Helena, trying to speak evenly.

"Next the flesh." He pointed to the box. "You see it always lies against white satin."

Helena put it round her neck, holding the thin chain tight. "Will that do?"

Harwich sat icily for a moment. He looked at her through narrowed eyes. His mouth went into a straight line. Anyone who knew him well would have been amazed at his unusual self-control. He had flung glasses, books and even bronzes upon less provocation.

"I am so sure that you don't intend to annoy or irritate me, Helena," he said, "that it is absurd to make the suggestion."

Helena turned upon him. She felt that she was being brought to bay by this man. "Will you please tell me exactly what you mean?" she cried.

"Yes," he replied. "I think I had better, as you don't care to understand. I wish you to take those things off, then to hang the chain round your neck and let me see the pearl lying between your breasts."

The girl drew in her breath. For a moment she made no movement. She might have been turned to salt. Then she took the thing off, dropped it into its box and went over to the window. It seemed to Harwich that she was trying to control her tears. He said nothing—not from any sympathetic intention. He was merely curious. She was by no means what he expected. He imagined that there might have been much reluctance, and eventually many tears. Then the pearl, then a kiss—*et bien!*

Then Helena spoke. "I married you knowing what to expect and because I had to. I'm not a coward, and I'm not mean enough to try to dodge what I swore to. But this other—business isn't done. It isn't decent. You're not going to turn me into a slave girl. I won't do it. It isn't in the bargain. You'll never say a truer thing than when you said I'm 'white.'"

The Duke got up slowly and gracefully. His eyes

glittered, but his mouth smiled. "I, on the contrary," he said, "am not. My sympathies are all oriental. . . . I think you make a mistake, dear child. After all, I am asking, at present, only just that. What is there so difficult or so deplorable? We have been united in holy matrimony, have we not? It will completely satisfy me if you will do what I ask," and without any actual show of temper he went out.

Helena sprang at the pearl. She had the desire to kill it as she would have killed a snake that threatened her. But it lay inert and dead, among the coils of its platinum chain—worth enough money to have left her free for her man. And then she wept badly, like a child who has just realized the whole meaning of death.

X

IT turned out that William, the Duke's man, was right. He had inherited the habit of holding blotting-paper up to a looking-glass. No announcement appeared in the newspapers, which would certainly have excited comment, but the Duke of Harwich returned to London barely a week after he had left for Paris for the honeymoon, and the Duchess made the long and tedious journey all across country to Paramé, to stay a week or two with her mother.

William was right, also, as to the fact that the Duke wanted to see his doctor. His anxiety about himself became so strong after the sight-seeing day in Paris, that he sent a telegram to his medical attendant, asking him to come over at once. This was impossible for Dr. Burchell to do, because one of his patients was lying dangerously ill with typhoid fever. And so, anxious to avoid what he considered would be the inevitable scurrilous paragraphs in London's several pornographic weekly

papers, Harwich controlled his nerves to the best of his ability, and remained at the Hôtel de Crillon until the end of the week, confined to his room.

He knew perfectly well what he had to fear. Some months before Dr. Burchell had warned him. The old symptoms had now returned and he was seriously alarmed.

Harwich was no coward. If he had been told that he was suffering from an advanced condition of heart disease, and had a month at most to live, he would have made his plans and settled his affairs stoically and quietly enough. If his case had been one that demanded a severe operation he would have faced it with perfect composure and even some slight interest. But it required the sort of patience of which he had none to look forward to a long lingering illness which would be a living death. To lose the use of his legs, to be wheeled about in a chair, to wait, day after day, month after month, perhaps year after year, for the paralysis to creep up and up. . . .

He lost all interest in Helena. All his thoughts became concentrated upon himself. He must keep quiet until his doctor could join him and set to work to patch him up again—even, perhaps, drive away this appalling disease. He lay for several days in his bedroom, alternately dozing and eyeing the ceiling, or watching the aimless manœuvres of the flies. He tried to keep his mind a blank, thinking neither of all the excesses in which he had indulged, nor of the danger that threatened him, as a result, in the future. He wanted to live and be well. He had never wanted to live and be well so poignantly. This was not because he loved Helena. He knew that he was incapable of loving anyone but himself. It was because he admired her, and desired to enjoy her, more than any girl who had ever come into his life. She was the very gem of his collection. Her golden loveliness, the delicious slim sweetness of her, her youth and whiteness

appealed to all his senses as a connoisseur. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and he had made her his wife because his wandering days were over, his collection, with the possession of her, complete. He intended to treat her well. She should be his toy, mostly to gratify his artistic delight in the female form by, as he put it, to himself, frequent exhibitions. He did not wish for children. Let the red-headed, big-handed Bellendines have the titles and estates again. He was a freak and had been punished for it. There should be no more black Bellendines by his doing.

A complex creature, this man Oliver Bellendine, Duke of Harwich. In all his dealings with men he was punctilious and forthright. He paid his way as he went to the uttermost farthing. His word was as good as his cheque. He was capable of unexpected generosity, and gave large sums to hospitals and to experimental laboratories on the strict condition that his name was never advertised. He was greatly gifted, and if there had been no touch of the East in his blood, he would have been a distinguished and even historical figure. He had more intelligence, logic, imagination, width of vision and knowledge of international affairs in his little finger than all the English government in the whole of their complacent plebeian bodies. But like other equally brilliant men, he chose deliberately to concentrate himself upon sex. He was a sex fiend, in the same way as men are opium fiends or Uranians. It was a pity. But for a sensitiveness that was as susceptible as the needle of a compass, he might have passed through his early suspected years without any ill effect. His father and mother and the clergyman's daughter who acted as his governess had much to answer for. They drove him to self-analysis—a disease in itself. They threw his imagination into the very orientalism for which they unjustly put the blame upon him. And it was almost entirely owing to their parental

suspicion and inhumanity that he was now, in the middle forties, a delicate, difficult man, with queer neurotic habits and a constitution completely undermined. If only men and women would realize that the little human boy who has been brought to life by them is made for the future in all those early hours that are spent in the nursery and the playground.

He called Helena into his room one afternoon. He was dressed and as carefully groomed as ever, but his face was drawn and grey, and at the back of his eyes there lay an untranslatable dread.

Williams was packing his things.

"I am not feeling very well, Helena," he said quietly. "The only doctor in whom I have any confidence lives near Cardinals, and so, with your permission, I am going to catch the boat from Calais that leaves to-night. You told me yesterday that Mrs. Harling is with the Luxminsters, at Dinard, was it? No, Paramé. Why not join her there for a week or two, and I will bring the yacht across from Southampton and fetch you as soon as Burchell has made me comfortable?"

The sun seemed to fall across Helena's face. "Can I get there to-night?" she asked.

An infinitesimal expression of reproach moved like a tiny shadow over the dark, inscrutable face.

"Can her Grace reach Paramé—that is, St. Malo—to-night, Williams?"

The man turned away from the case over which he had been bending with the expert curve of the valet whose work is a calling. "Not possible, your Grace," he replied. "There is one train a day, leaving somewhere about nine-thirty in the morning and getting in as near five o'clock as you can expect of a French train."

"Yes, I remember," said Harwich, watching the disappointment in Helena's unguarded eyes. "And one is shaken to fiddle-strings and peppered with smuts. Before

we leave this evening, see the people downstairs and tell them to arrange everything for her Grace to-morrow."

"Very good, your Grace."

"Thanks most awfully," said Helena. "I'm simply dying to see mother again."

"Yes? Let me see, how long is it since we left London?"

She made a shy step forward. The man looked different in an indefinable way. "I hope you will be all right again in a day or two," she said. "I shall keep a good look-out for your yacht."

It was a splendid attempt, but it did not mislead the man who had been given the right to call himself her husband. "Will you? Thanks. If the weather's good we'll go round the coast."

They stood facing each other. Commonplaces didn't come, even with difficulty.

Then Helena moved her shoulders and took a new and firmer footing. She looked as though she had pulled herself together to take a wide jump over a swift, swollen stream. "Would you rather I came with you?" she asked.

Harwich laughed. How lovely and naïve and childish this young thing was. "I married you," he said, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well. I will, then."

His hand touched her arm as she was turning. "No, please. You will only be very lonely while I am undergoing the patching treatment. Spread your wings, my dear, and fly to the sea, and if you believe in God and prayer, as I am sure you do, ask that I may escape from wheels and a man pushing behind."

"I will," said Helena. She gave him her hand with a gesture of tremendous sympathy.

The man grasped it. It seemed to fire him suddenly.

He put his other arm round her neck, drew her face to his lips and took her mouth.

. . . Her blood went cold. All the people and traffic below the window of her room seemed to be bats that had flown across her face. She gave God thanks for the respite that his going would give her.

They said good-bye in the foyer of the hotel. With a thin coat on his arm, Williams stood at the door of the car. Helena, with the light from the portico on her tawny hair and white neck, walked with Harwich across the wide pavement. He bared his head and held out his hand.

"Well, *au revoir,* then," he said, smiling.

"*Au revoir.* I hope you'll have a smooth crossing."

"Oh, I think so. The wind is with me."

"Is it?"

"And, in any case, it doesn't bother me. My very kind regards to your mother."

"Thank you."

"Have a good time by the sea, won't you?"

"Yes."

"You won't bathe, of course."

"Why not?"

"In case anyone should see you going in."

She didn't join in his laugh.

When the car turned he saw her standing where he had left her. She wasn't looking after him. Her face was held up to the moon, as though to welcome an old and intimate friend who understood her. And with the curious psychic faculty that goes so often with orientalism, he knew with the utter completeness of certainty that he should never speak to her again as a man upon his feet. He saw himself looking up at her, as she was looking then far out of her reach, from a thing on wheels.

The Miracle of Love

XI

AN old hale priest, with the face of a philosopher who yet believed in being human, and whose shiny *soutane* was much spotted down the front, passed along the cliffs of Paramé every afternoon with an English friend to bathe from the little hut that sat, all alone, just below the level of the top. The sun had been passionately in love with the sea for several exquisite days, and the long gradual curve of the inimitable emerald coast seemed more blessed than ever. Regularly for several afternoons he had pointed out to the broad-beamed boy at his side a girl whose hat lay on the short, dry grass and who was writing in a book on her knee. The tawniness of her hair and the sweet curve of her chin had caught the boy's eye and touched his imagination long before the abbé had seen her.

"She writes, my son," the priest had said. "Only one who runs may read, is it not?" And the boy had envied and looked back and back.

Helena slipped away to that God-sent spot when her mother had gone up to her room after a much-enjoyed and discussed meal to slip off her stays and get a little rest—her sleep was not so good as it used to be, my dear—and there she wrote long letters to her man. It was due to him to explain why she had married the Duke, not because he would believe what people said about the marriage—he was *her* man—but because nothing of any consequence had ever happened that she hadn't told him.

All the same, these letters were not easy to write. In telling about her father her pen was held back by her natural desire to be loyal. Dear old Evelyn was to her, more than to anyone else on earth, a true gentleman and a wonderful man. She knew him infinitely less well than

a tailor knows an occasional customer. But his letters to her to the vicarage had been filled with such charm and loving affection, such excellent advice and such plucky accounts of his struggle in an atmosphere so out of keeping with his instincts and race—he meant the city—and he had been so tenderly thoughtful and imaginatively kind when he saw her in the holidays, that she had taken him at his face-value and multiplied it by two. Her excuses for the deed which had made it necessary for her to marry the Duke were, therefore, ingenious as well as ingenuous.

And when she came to the story of those uneasy, uncanny days and evenings in Paris there was another difficulty. She was unable to understand the point of view of the man who tried to treat her as though she had been brought to him by an old merchant in his caravan and sold for a lac of gold.

They were strange, pathetic letters, alive with courage as well as regret, with horror as well as with the little unconscious touches of humour that go with a keenly observant eye. They disclosed the whole temperament of the girl, her practicality, her pluck, her determination to carry out her bargain as she conceived it, her etherealism and her deeply ingrained and unshakable belief that the man to whom she wrote was living and waiting and loving, and was reading over her shoulder. She had never heard, except very vaguely, of reincarnation. She could not have the inestimable comfort, therefore, of believing—and how beautiful and satisfactory it is—that he and she had been together in a former life.

All through those busy, peaceful, clean, early-to-sleep and early-to-rise vicarage days that seemed so very far away she had been secretly engaged to be married. There was nothing hole-and-corner about it all. It was too sacred and wonderful a thing to discuss, even with her bosom friends.

Those sunny days at Paramé were very good. The Luxminsters were cheery, kind people, cousins of her mother's. Their villa, of stereotype French design, with much tortured wood about the turrets and verandah, faced the sea. Lord Luxminster put in a high old time, as he expressed it, with his round, fat laugh, on the remains of a fine income, the greater part of which had been spilt on the race-course. With the eagle-eyed assistance of his fond and faithful wife, who was supposed to have been a barmaid at an hotel at Newmarket, and whose much-powdered face was still very pretty and good-natured, he lived just within his income by sticking to French watering-places nearly all the year round. He made himself the leading spirit among the equally poor English contingent, bathed twice a day, fished as though for a living, endeavoured to control a slow but certain increase in weight by playing lawn tennis like a grampus, and settled down to bridge with grim earnestness and timid declarations every evening, for small stakes. Mrs. Harling was, in her lazy, easy-going way, very fond of Minnie Luxminster, whom she called "Bunny" because she ate like a rabbit. The fact that she was not "one of us, poor dear thing," amused Mrs. Harling, who would always rather herd with people out of her class, "because, you see, my dear, their point of view is *so* naïve, and they say such funny things about the Ten Commandments." It was natural that she should patronize her relation a little, but she made no effort to correct her occasional lapses into hotel English. She told Helena that to do such a thing would be as foolish as to put water-colours on a too florid oil-painting. On the contrary, she took a quite kindly delight in leading "Bunny" into labyrinthine mazes of English grammar, and then in running metaphorically away to watch her extricate herself as best she could, while tears of laughter streamed down both their faces. For Lady Luxminster had no

side, boasted only of the fact that she was a true wife and a good cook, and was able at any moment to laugh at herself. As she often said at dinner, with Arthur Luxminster beaming at her from the head of the omelette-loaded table, covered with bottles of *vin ordinaire*—"and damned good stuff too, b' Jove!"—she would have taken her old man had he been the guard on the London coach, whom, oddly enough, he exactly resembled, even to the lips that were all cockled as though from frequent horn-blowings.

"Bunny" was very proud, openly very proud, of playing hostess to the Duchess of Harwich. Her only regret, she said, was that there were no English servants in the villa to whom she could say, "Where is her Grace?" She had never seen Helena before, and she watched her with frank admiration and openly expressed delight.

"My word, Arthur," she said, the night Helena arrived, "don't she positively bloom! Really, she gives me a queer sensation about the heart every time I set eyes on her. She makes me ache to go over to her and wrap her in my arms and put her darling head on my breast. Oh, not because I think she needs sympathy—though God knows she ought to, given over to that snake-charmer fellow, Harwich, poor pet! but because I feel I *want* her for my very own, to mother and look after."

"Yes," replied Arthur, a little hurriedly, watching her brush her peroxide hair with affectionate eyes. "She's a topping gal, no doubt of it, quite a topping gal. Ah, clear moon to-night, dearie. Fine day to-morrow."

But Minnie Luxminster did not intend to be led off at quite so obvious a tangent. "Oh, Arthur, Arthur," she went on, "you've made me very happy, old man, but I wish you had given me a baby like that, dear. My word, it would a-been good. I should be scouring the land now, like an elderly and jealous tigress, on the look-out for a real, clean, nice, manly young fellow as a hus-

band. I dunno how it is, but she's the only girl I've ever seen who makes me feel that I haven't done all my job as a woman. I've looked after you and kept you straight, and of course I *can* say that you've been as much trouble as half a dozen children, can't I? But, my word, my boy, I should go to church on Christmas Day—the only day I ever do go to church, worse luck!—and say a heap of grateful things on my knees with her as my very own, all sweet and white by my side. Well, hop in, dear. I'll turn out the light."

"I really ought to have been your mother, honey," she told Helena the next morning. "My hair's just the same colour, isn't it?"

And the chorus of laughter made by Lady Luxminster, Mrs. Harling and the brown-faced Brittany servant made passers-by smile.

It was noticed that Mrs. Harling went strangely out of her way never to refer to her daughter by her married name, and was caught several times by Lady Luxminster looking at her wistfully, with her eyes all flooded with tears. The snake-charmer, as "Bunny" aptly called him, occupied a horrid place in Mrs. Harling's nightly dreams, and once, waking from one of them cold and shaking, she wobbled, ludicrously like an ungainly goose in her ample night-gown, to Helena's bedroom and peeped in to satisfy herself that she was alone and safe.

To Helena these days in the sun, with a sparkling, undisturbed sea breaking tunefully on the golden sand, the merry, white-shoed, white-skirted, white-stockinged life of holiday makers all about her, the constant tinkling music from the casino a stone's-throw away, the great nights ruled over by the white mother and all her gleaming children, were too good to be true. She was afraid to look out of the window in the morning lest she should see the white, graceful, steam yacht, a photograph of which

the Duke had shown her, lying off the shore. And when at meals, with her back to the windows, she never heard the insistent pit-pit of a motor bicycle without turning cold in case it should be the launch coming in to fetch her. She felt not as though she, like all the rest of the people in the place, were on holiday, but like a prisoner out on parole. The approach of the postman made her heart stand still, and one morning, when a *petit-bleu* was brought up to the villa for Arthur Luxminster, she sank into a chair trembling like a mouse under the very teeth of a green-eyed cat.

A week slipped self-consciously away and then another week. Her mother's odd moments of tenderness, and the many signs of Lady Luxminster's exuberant but sincere liking, warmed Helena, and very nearly gave her back her sense of independence. Arthur, too, who took her sailing and taught her to fish and go crabbing, and treated her like a little sister, gave her back her trust in men and her respect.

The yacht never came, except as a less and less frequent spectre, anchored like a ghost, in the long lane of light from the moon. But one morning a letter in a strange handwriting was lying on her plate on the breakfast-table. It was the summons to return.

It said: "I regret to be obliged to tell you that the Duke had a seizure last night, and is now lying unconscious and very ill. He knew what to expect, and he desired that I should not telegraph to you unless there were no hope. So I write this letter because his is an illness which does not kill at once."

This uncomfortable little note was signed "Edward Charles Burchell."

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XII

MRS. HARLING went up to her bedroom. She had dressed to go over to Dinard with the others to lunch with some London friends who were staying at the big hotel. She had allowed Effie to take special pains with her unruly hair, and had tied on a wide mushroom hat with a large green veil. She had put herself to the trouble, too, of hooking up her dress completely, a thing she seldom did, and, on the whole felt really braced up and willing to face all eyes for the first time for many a day. But the sight of Helena's face as she read the doctor's letter acted upon her like a pin in a child's airball. She fell into a sort of mental heap, and as soon as she could get away from her untouched breakfast retired to her room, relieved herself of her clothes, and sat with the blinds down, rocking to and fro in her chair like an old Irishwoman, moaning and moaning.

"My God!" said Minnie Luxminster, with startling directness. "Why couldn't the man have been taken by an angel with a liking for niggers, and set the honey-child free? Arthur, I shall go to the station with you. Buck up, man! We can't let the child go off alone. The train goes in half an hour, and then it'll be twenty minutes late. Don't finick about which hat you'll wear. Run and fetch a cab. Marthe, *apportez-moi* . . . oh, damn! What's the French for parasol? Tell her, Arthur, tell her. . . ."

"All ready, darling? How sweet you look! I must say I *do* like a white hat on golden hair. Arthur's gone for a cab. The run will do him good. Melt off some of his fat. That you, Effie? Now, don't fluster yourself. And don't put the jewel-case on the butter. *Marte, Marte, allez-vous ong* and bring down the rest of *le*

bagage. Vite, fat pig! I shall never be really fluent in this crack-jaw language. . . . Ah, here's Arthur. Good boy! But oh, my God, what a cab! Look! he's got bits of harness tied together with boot-laces. Well, we can only be killed once, thank Heaven! Where's your mother, honey? I know, I saw her panting up to her room. Why is it that some women *must* get out of their stays in a crisis? I always get into mine. They give me moral courage. Now, Arthur, don't stand about on one leg giving uncalled-for imitations of a penguin dreaming of mackerel. That's right, old boy. Carry it out yourself. Go on, Effie. . . . What a girl that is to talk. *I'm* talking like a bunch of monkeys myself, my darling, because if I don't I shall make a complete damn fool of myself, I'm that sorry you've got to leave me."

Apparently unable to hold her tongue, even for a moment, this big-hearted, unaffected, unself-conscious, emotional woman, who would gladly have gone to Cardinals with Helena and put herself to any fatigue, inconvenience or expense to help her, got into the crowded cab. With what she called a striking hat mounted on her awfully golden hair, her blackened eyebrows standing out on her powdered face like the marks of a ski, and her protruding bosom geographically plain through a lingerie frock, it was no wonder that she was the butt of a little clique of English people who laid claim, with various degrees of inaccuracy, to gentle birth, but who could not recognize in her a true and admirable woman. All the way to the station, through the sand-covered streets with their drunken telephone poles, she talked. She continued to talk on the hot platform, where the train, according to a cynical official, "might start soon, or nearly soon." She talked an amazing mixture of colloquial English and cockney French to the woman at the bookstall, where she bought an armful of inde-

scribable papers and English magazines, and finally she talked, or tried to talk, to Helena, hanging on to the window-sash of the carriage, shouted at by four excited officials who would give their souls to see the last of the train.

She said brokenly: "God bless and keep you, my darling girl, and when you want a real pal, wire for me and I'll break my bally neck to get to you."

Arthur tottered beneath her weight as the train made an unexpected start, and she stood waving the soft felt hat that she grabbed from his head until the train disappeared from sight. Then she walked home in grim and awful silence, bubbling with suppressed emotion like a syphon of soda-water, stumped up to Mrs. Harling's room, put her arms warmly round the poor, moaning woman and cursed dear old Evelyn with a flow that would have made the oldest known barge-owner retire in dudgeon and alarm.

At the first stop—sun blazing, bells ringing, cries of *"La Presse, Le Journal . . . chocolat"* . . . Helena climbed out, walked along the train, dogged by an official, who implored that he might be of service, found Effie in a third-class compartment, wedged between a sturdy peasant woman in a black dress and a perspiring *piou-piou* in a gaping tunic, and called her out. For the remainder of the hot, dirty, slow, body-and-nerve jerking journey through some of the most beautiful country in the world, the two girls sat together, sometimes talking in whispers, mostly silent.

The train was very late, and as it rumbled through the depressing outskirts of Paris, where cut-throat-looking houses stood about out-at-elbows in patches of kitchen garden, and tenement buildings, with adventurous underclothing hanging to dry from nearly all the unclean windows, lined the way, the sun went down

with all the pomp and colour and solemnity of a royal death. Above the ill-considered tendrils of the flower-like city the sky became red. It looked as if blood had spurted from a great angry wound.

Finally, Paris—with no time to do anything more than drive across from Mont Parnasse to the Gare du Nord, the taxi-auto dancing over the cobbles of fuggy side streets, where small charcuteries and cafés sent forth strong odours of coffee and onions, and where tired tradespeople sat outside their premises in shirt sleeves and smoked the little corporal. There were frequent glimpses of one and other of the great avenues, all alive and ablaze, and then the station with its indiscriminate crowd. Effie made a dart at the restaurant and took a collection of ham-pies and rolls and chocolates to the—luckily—empty compartment, and before the train left for Calais the two girls were eating hungrily and drinking luke-warm ginger-ale from the bottle. A cool breeze refreshed them, and before very long they fell asleep, tired and dirty, one of them to dream of Cardinals, black pearls, olive-shaped, observant eyes. . . .

As soon as the boat left Calais and put out to sea Effie disappeared. During the train journey she had told Helena that she knew she would. It was betting on a certainty.

Helena went forward and stood alone with a strong, south-east wind blowing through her. She needed the tonic of its steady, invigorating cleanness. She needed the bracing up that the example of the boat gave, with her regular pulse and all her energy and courage stirred to the right completion of her duty to her passengers and her mail. There is always something fine and big in these animate inanimate things. They swing out from a safe anchorage, mammoth liners and small passenger steamers, and set their noses to the line marked by the

compass by night and day, the mere toys of the uncertain seas, which, suddenly bursting into rage, can fling them to destruction.

And as the girl stood there, hatless, with the wind playing with her tawny hair, her lovely face stung by the salt of it, she faced England and Cardinals, the great house that was to be her prison, with growing courage. She was, she told herself, young. She had faith in God and His goodness, and somewhere in the world there was the man who loved her and whom she loved, and who was as much hers if she never met him as he was if she were riding to him then. Life was no more smooth and certain than the sea beneath her. At any moment its apparently settled peacefulness and security could be dashed to pieces by a storm, no sign of which was given. Was she to allow herself to take fright and go floundering away from the point to which the inscrutable needle of duty pointed, or go steadily on through wind and waves? Yes, she would go on, trusting the Unseen Hand, pinning her whole faith to the Master, the Father of all little people whose lines across the dark way were inevitably laid down and marked out. If there were to be a moon to light her as she went and stars to mark her course, she would give thanks. If not, well, there were others struggling in the same darkness by whom her signals, if she were beaten, would be answered.

The morning, which woke in a bad humour, was cold and dull. A mist hung sulkily over the white cliffs of Dover. The boat train was waiting patiently on the quay. It would take them into London before the city was thoroughly awake and astir. A look at her own pale face and Effie's white one decided Helena to rest at the Lord Warden Hotel. They had breakfast together, saying very little, and went to their rooms.

But no sleep came to Helena. She lay in the dark

and tossed upon her bed, filled with a sense of unrest, excitement and of some big event that was impending, which she was unable to control. All her thoughts were turned into chaos by cruel visions and scraps of conversation heard vaguely. Harwich's clear, insistent voice came to her, and with it, as if in a duet, one that was young and eager and trembling with love. She saw herself locked in a room, every beautiful, strange object in which filled her with nausea, and through its barred windows two clear eyes looked in that were filled with a great and excellent desire. She felt that she stood naked, shaking and frightened, in a great domed hall, falsely lighted, its mosaic floor glistening and iridescent, chained to the wall with an iron band round her ankle, and she could see the man she loved kneeling at her feet, working incessantly but impotently to cut the chain in two. . . .

It was afternoon before she fell at last into a heavy, dull sleep. Effie crept in several times to tell her about trains, but hadn't the heart to disturb her. Finally, at six o'clock, she opened her eyes. Effie was sitting by the window, crying quietly, like a child. She was homesick and miserable and very lonely. The afternoon train had gone. Either they would have to go by the one that met the night boat or wait until the following midday.

"I'll think it over," said Helena. "I *must* go, but . . ."

Several times while dressing for dinner she got as far but not farther than this. She must go on to Cardinals, where the Duke lay ill. That was her place by law and church. But—what was it that seemed to make it impossible to leave the hotel? What was the meaning of the sudden sense of having arrived at the end of her journey?

She was hardly able to sit still while Effie did her hair. Joy, complete happiness, and a wild, tremulous excitement rushed through her veins. She felt like breaking

into song. Everywhere she looked it seemed to be sunny. What hideously cruel trick was fate playing with her?

She stood very still, with her hands over her eyes, and asked herself the question, again and again. That man with the black pearl to whom she had been sold was ill. Whether she was actually his wife or not she was his property, bought and paid for with cash. If for no other reason, decency demanded that she should go to him at once. There *was* another reason—charity tinged with pity. What conceivable right, then, had she to tingle with the joy of life? Why should her brain and heart and spirit flame into a sort of ecstasy? Why did the room swim with an outburst of so sweet a song that she wondered why every soul in the town did not rush to stand below her windows to listen? It was unexplainable, inexplicable—then. Afterwards, when, watched in wonder by Effie, she went down to dinner, and having lingered for a moment in the deserted foyer, walked into the dining-room and was taken to a table, she looked up, felt her eyes drawn across the room and saw Clive, she knew.

There sat the man to whom she had written all her secret letters and who held her heart.

PART III

I

LADY EMILY'S room had been like an office for a fortnight. From ten o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon she sat there, wearing a man's straw hat and a large pair of tortoiseshell spectacles interviewing a series of men and women, bargaining like a fish-wife.

George Alan Fitzroy, Duke of Cheshire by the grace of God and against all his own wishes, was going to be married. Like most of the other dukes, he was going to be married in the village church of Sumptermead, whose rector held his benefice by gift of the Hurbert family.

Even in these days such an event was more important to the people on the estate and in the town than an election. For the former it meant a general holiday and fête, and for the latter all that they could get by supplying marquees, cocoanut-shies, roundabouts, a band, food and drink. It seemed perfectly natural and right that Lady Emily should appoint herself general manager of the show. She had the gift of organization. She knew what things cost and how to get them for less. She knew precisely what had happened, and where, when George's father was married. She understood and appreciated the village mind—a peculiar one, unlike any other—and intended to see that it was satisfied. Above and beyond these things, all essential, she wanted keenly

to get George married and settled and on the way to the foundation of the new line of Hurberts. And, lastly, as she told George and Clive when she shooed them off to London to get new silk hats and leave her in peace, she "liked the job. Even at my time of life, boys, old man devil sneaks in where there are idle hands, so run along, do the theatres, put in a good time, and let me have the pleasure of running the whole blessed thing, lock, stock, barrel and bung."

It was a sight for the gods to see the capable, practical, indefatigable way in which that little, wiry, grey-haired woman tackled the business. At the beginning of it all, the great day having been definitely arranged—"Well, well," said George, "good-bye, big-game shootin' "—she mounted her cocky, dock-tailed hack, flinging her leg over the saddle like any man—better than most—and galloped across the park to the town. A friend of hers there, who pluckily carried on the work of her dead husband, and ran a general stationer's shop, where also afternoon tea was served, possessed a daughter, who had been learning shorthand and typewriting with a view to becoming—the poor little fool read novels in bed—secretary to a Cabinet minister and the wife of his eldest son with the straight nose and the kinky hair.

To the girl she said abruptly, looking down at the soft thing from her saddle: "They tell me you do shorthand."

"Yes, my lady."

"Does that mean that you can transcribe what you take down?"

"Oh, yes, my lady."

"Very brainy and unique, I'm sure. Your good mother tells me that you type also."

"Yes, my lady."

"And spell correctly too?"

"Oh, yes, my lady."

"Ah! Well, how about earning two pound a week for three weeks? Any good to you?"

"Indeed, yes, my lady."

"Then I'll send the cart down for you to-morrow morning at nine o'clock sharp. Bundle into it with your beastly ticking machine, bring a willing smile, and come up to the house. That all right?"

"Yes, my lady.'"

"Right. Good morning."

That over, she rode on down the High Street, whose old Queen Anne houses had been scandalously defaced, but made practically useful by the addition of flutey modern shop-fronts, and along which a buzzing and spitting series of electric tramcars ran beneath a hideous cat's-cradle of overhead wires, to the shop of the man Stycke. This side-whiskered, bottle-shouldered person, whose eyes were crossed, supplied rout seats and tents and sold tennis-racquets and motor requirements, and ran a garage in a crumbling stable, once dignified by horses relaying the old Oxford coaches, now put out of work by the smelly introduction of petrol. He was trying to sell a secondhand motor-car, some years old, to a man who dealt in horses, and who was at a loose end because he couldn't examine the car's teeth and run his suspicious hand down her hocks. He looked round, on hearing his name called sharply.

"Old Em," he said; "'scuse me," and ran up the yard.

"Morning, Stycke."

"Good morning to your ladyship, I'm sure."

"I want you to quote a price for putting up three large marquees, one for men and women, one for children and one for road-spoilers, I mean chauffeurs, in the park, on the day of the twenty-seventh, together with tables, seats, flags, and all the rest of it."

"I shall be very pleased, my lady."

"I hope I shall. Also quote for the usual village games—roundabouts, swings, shies, the sucking-pig, rings, pole for pillow fights—I can do the pillows—and ropes and posts to rule the people off the gardens. Do you see?"

"I do, my lady."

Lady Emily wondered with which eye. One seemed to be on the town hall to the left and the other on the fire-station to the right. However, it was his business.

"Very good. Bring it up to me to the house to-morrow. Let me advise you to make it out to-night at your lowest possible figure, sleep on it, and take off a quarter before you have your coffee—or is it tea? Good morning." Heels in the hack's ribs, and off.

Next stop the caterer, by name Emanuel Brownstack, late Littlebrow. A stout woman, with a florid face, a series of unmanageable chins and a skirt much wrinkled over the hips, came out breathlessly. She had been waiting eagerly for the appearance of the little grey woman.

"Good morning, Lady Emily."

"Good morning to you, Mrs. Brownstack. Been putting on more weight, I see."

"Well, Lady Emily, do what I can . . ."

"Eat less, though God knows it must be difficult to keep your fingers from straying and picking among all those bottles of sweetstuff. I see you know why I'm here."

"Well, Lady Emily, hearing the news . . ."

"Exactly. There'll be about eight hundred hungry beggars to stuff, won't there? Better allow for eight fifty. Lunch and tea. Make out your estimate for the supply of everything, including waiters—I'll do the flowers—and bring it up to me in the morning. If I don't see you by eleven-thirty I'll send to Chester. Then we'll haggle. Good morning."

Then she trotted back, touching her hat with two well-gloved fingers, to the right and left. She rode to the vicarage, called to an octogenarian road-mender to open the gate, gave him a smile for his courtesy, and walked the hack up the well-rolled drive to the warm, old house, dated from the fact that several of its windows had been bricked up by a long-ago owner who didn't see the force of paying a window-tax to a king for supplying wine and hot meats to ladies of easy virtue.

A tall man with white hair, an ascetic face, and a paradox in his lower waistcoat, rose from a stone seat under a cypress-tree, laid aside a newspaper and ambled forward.

"Ah, my dear Lady Emily, this is indeed a pleasure."

"Yes, Vicar, it is. I shall be thundering glad when my nephew has been safely tied up by you. Nothing will give me greater pleasure and relief, I can tell you."

"I can well understand that."

"Of course you can. Now I want you to be good enough to get your curate to scratch his golf to-morrow —it will only be one morning lost—and to bring round to me, before lunch—he shall stay and bite something if he's amiable—a list of suitable hymns. I'll go through them and tick them off. While he's with me I'll take him round and show him the flowers with which you will decorate the church. Can that be achieved?"

The vicar smiled. The underlying sarcasm of his old friend appealed to him. His various curates, coming from Oxford and Cambridge, devoted more time and energy to games than to work.

"I will see to it," he replied. "And when am I to have the pleasure of marrying Lord Clive?"

Lady Emily pursed up her lips. Into her mind's eye came the tall, well set-up figure of her blessed boy and his eyes that had been burning. "I wish I knew," she said. "Well, what's the news? Has the Government

given India to the Russians yet, or made a handsome present of our navy to Emperor William?"

The vicar's eyes twinkled, but having acquired wisdom, he held aloof from politics.

Lady Emily babbled on: "Charming house, this, and, dear me, how good your chrysanthemums are this autumn. But the leaves are falling, Vicar. We don't grow younger, do we, you and I? When George has been married two or three years, and there's a perambulator on the terrace, I shall waddle round one morning and apply for the post of housekeeper. Oh, by the way, no bridge till after the wedding. No rest for the wicked till that great boy and his little girl are off for the honeymoon and the tents are folded up and the rice swept away. *Au revoir,* old friend."

"*Au revoir,* dear lady."

But when the little grey woman came to the church, with its battered and weather-soiled Norman tower, she dismounted, tied up the hack to the high gate and walked briskly in. It was empty, but for the spirits of all the people who had worshipped before its simple altar, and silent but for the merry chirping of the sparrows in the trees above the graves. She went on tiptoe to the family pew, opened its black oak door quietly, knelt on one of the dull red cushions, and asked God, in less colloquial language than it was her habit to use elsewhere, to watch over "my dear, dear boy in this crisis of his life."

II

GEORGE and Clive returned the day before the wedding. The results of Lady Emily's "lock, stock, barrel and bung," stared them in the face as soon as they drove through the gates of the park. Everything was ready for the great day, and flags were flying from

the poles of the three huge marquees. The merry-go-rounds, cocoanut-shies, boat-swings, Aunt Sallies and bowls were all up. So was the pole on which the village boys were to sit straddle and pommel each other with pillows until they rolled off among the shouting partisans. A bevy of carpenters were putting the finishing touches to the band-stand, and in a small enclosure of hurdles a fat and wondering pig was standing in lonely boredom, waiting to be won by the man or woman who made the best score at bowls. Lady Emily's small, neat figure, dressed in riding kit, could be seen moving quickly from place to place, as she cast a final examining eye on everything. She was closely followed by the typist, note-book in hand, and the old dachshund, who showed canine curiosity in the usual way.

Autumn had spread her reluctant, destroying hand upon the oaks and beeches. Their browns and reds had already begun to make patterns at their roots. Nearly all the colour had gone out of the great flower-beds at the foot of the terrace. Swallows had gone. Blown across the park by a brisk south-east wind was the pungent smoke from a fire of dead-dry plants and dew-wet leaves, the smell of which is peculiar to the fall. It is the certain forerunner of decay and the year's decrepitude, and brings with it a little indefinable note of sadness and depression.

George was in high spirits. He had nothing in common with the type of man who made a martyr of himself, or groused about what might have been, "if only." To him there was now only what had to be and was. He was entering into marriage with the same whole-heartedness as he entered into everything else, and during his stay in London had gone out of his way to see as much of the girl whose money was so necessary and be very nice to her. The charm of her youth and enthusiasm, the shyness of her love and admiration, the eagerness

with which she desired to begin her new life, had their effect. George found himself drawn towards his little girl whose head only came up to his top waistcoat button. "She's a darling," he said to Clive on the way down. "She's creepin' into my heart and snugglin' down there as warm as toast. That's good, isn't it, old man? I should loathe myself and life if she brought all this money into the family and got nothin' in return. As it is, if it isn't exactly a love-match, it's become deuced near it. She has dignity, that child, by Jove, and a quaint little sense of duty that'll make her felt and respected and useful. I can see her trottin' about among the tenants with cheery words and something to lighten 'em up in her pocket. Oh, yes, it's all for the best, thank God, and, after all, it's a poor sort of game that a man plays alone, eh? . . . D'y'know, I had a funny dream last night. I woke up laughin', but with a bit of a lump in my throat. I was in the gun-room here one night, as plain as a pikestaff, and you were with me, rather quiet, buckin' me up now and then with a word or two, and I was waitin', in a dead funk, with beads of perspiration on my forehead, for the doctor to come down with a very precious bit of news. It was the middle of the night, and it was summer, because we could hear a nightingale giving voice like a blessed prima donna. And just before dawn, when I didn't think I could stand another minute of it, the door opened and a man with a grey beard poked his head in and said: 'Boy—a regular Hurbert.' Ever have a dream like that?"

"Yes," said Clive.

And then George was silent for some time, looking under his big red eyebrows at his brother, whose eyes were on the country as it slipped away behind the train.

"Did you see anything of her, old man, while you were in town?" he asked suddenly, without any lead-up to the question.

"No," said Clive. "She's been at Cardinals all the time."

"Ah, yes, nursin' that poor devil. What a punishment! Do you . . . write to each other?"

"Every day," said Clive.

"Good Lord! Is it as bad as that?"

Clive faced his brother. "No, it's as good as that," he replied. "I went down to Cardinals one night—the night you were dancing at Devonshire House. I needed her so frightfully that I couldn't help myself. . . . I walked about underneath the windows. I didn't know which of them all belonged to her room. There wasn't a light in any of them, except one. I imagine that was his. . . . I hadn't been there long before one of them opened and in the moonlight I saw her standing, all white. Somehow, I can only think it's because we are in such amazing sympathy, she knew I was there and I called, in an agony. She threw down a flower and went away. . . . If this had been the sixteenth century, I should have broken into that house that night, picked her up and carried her off."

"Um!" said George. "I'm certain of that. Well, trust to luck and keep your powder dry, Clive, old boy. She's worth waitin' for."

Clive's eyes blazed with the intensity of his feeling. "Waiting for? . . . My God! I've been waiting since I was a kid and so has she. We've both known and loved and waited since we've been old enough to think and feel. Her spirit has been with me and mine with hers. We recognized each other the second we met. It's wonderful, unexplainable."

"Yes, and so beautiful," said George gravely, "that you mustn't either of you do anything to put a soil on it. . . . There's one thing you can be precious thankful about, although you have met too late. She's not that man's wife."

Clive heaved a big breath. "No, she's not, thank God."

The dear little soft mother was very happy that evening. She had both her boys with her at home—a rare treat. And they were good boys, she told herself proudly and thankfully, who had managed to go so far through life with clean hands and clean consciences and healthy bodies. It was the last night of her life that she could have her great George as her very own. To-morrow and onwards he would belong to another woman. It was right. It was in the scheme of good things, and she was glad indeed. It meant a new young branch on an old tree, the beginning of a new phase, a new generation. But as she sat at the dinner-table quietly watching and admiring her first-born as he talked and laughed and ate heartily, chaffing the little grey woman and winning smiles from Clive, her mind, as it must do with all women who are wearing to the end of their spell, ran back over all the years and stopped in a nursery, where a baby boy, just able to walk, dropped his toys at the sight of her and toddled unsteadily across the room with outstretched arms and a cry of "mudder." Then, more than at any future time, except when his hungry lips were pressed to her young, proud breast, he was hers, wholly, entirely. She was first in his sight. He came to her bed in the morning and snuggled into her arms. He looked up from his crib at night with sleepy eyes, and went into a dreamless, contented rest with her kisses on his face and lips. . . . Birth, marriage and death—it was the good, inevitable law of nature. She had brought her big boy to life, she would see him married and, dying, would wait for him on the other side to hear yet once again that glad and eager cry of "mudder," which was her privilege and reward Poor, dear, proud, humble, thankful, little old lady

She, like all mothers, was facing the second milestone. She was going to lose her boy. . . . Nature seems to have but little sympathy for the old. Trees drop their dead limbs and others grow. Birds come back one day and find the nest empty and cold. It is for the young that nature cares, for the young and strong. Old things drop, having served their purpose, having brought into life those who, in their turn, will grow old too. And on it goes, rhythmically, steadily, monotonously, like a song —the law, the purpose—Life.

But she never said a word of the pain that was in her heart. She laughed and smiled, and afterwards sat at the piano and played the familiar tunes to the long-legged man who lay full-stretch on the rug in front of the fire, dreaming as he did when he lay there as a boy —but differently. It was only when she said good night to him that her thin arms tightened round his neck and there was the old passion of motherhood in the kisses that she pressed upon his face.

The boy who was now a man and whose imagination was fresh and sweet and a little feminine—like all true imaginations—understood much of what was passing through the brain of the little lady to whom he always returned from his wanderings with eager feet. He held her tenderly and warmly to his broad chest, in silence. And back to his ears came the soft song with simple words about God and angels that she had sung so often to him when the sun had set and birds were putting their young to sleep under the eaves, and which he never heard now without tears wetting his heart. Had he been a little thoughtless when he had needed her devoted hand no longer? Had he seemed unkind and ungrateful when he took his holidays as a schoolboy away from her side? Had he inflicted wounds upon her body by his long and frequent absences from home which were not necessary and were merely to gratify

his wanderlust? Would she take with her to the grave many regrets that he had thoughtlessly and selfishly built up? . . .

He put his head down on her shoulder for a moment, as he had done when he was a child, and when he whispered the old fond words, "Mudder, my darling mudder," into her ear, and saw the blood flood her face and the tears glorify her eyes, he knew, better than he knew anything in life, that there would be gratitude in her prayers that night and a smile on her face as she slept.

III

ALBERT EDWARD CRESTON and his tight, hard, high-chested wife, who looked as though she had been forced into her clothes, as tooth-paste is forced into a tube, were secretly exhilarated and excited at the sight which met them as they drove up to the house before the ceremony. They found themselves in a long line of large automobiles, among which, with resentful nostrils, were several glossy pairs, with high-working knees. The county had come to see the marriage of the Duke to their girl, who would be, within an hour, "my daughter, the Duchess of Cheshire, you know." The able, level-headed, hard-boned Mr. Creston, of the world-famous Creston's Linoleum, a boon to all according to the enormous advertisements that made blots upon the country through which every railway company in the kingdom sends its trains, possessed no humour, not a vestige. It was as well, because if he had, he could not have believed more firmly than he believed anything else in life that his hideous linoleum *was* a boon to all, and so the stuff would have lacked heart and push. If he had he could not, as a pillar of the Radical party, have sat back in his two-thousand-guinea car and congratulated him-

self on his latest investment. This is what he called the large sum of money that he had made over to his daughter on her engagement to one of the men born to sit in that house against which he had tub-thumped since youth.

Notwithstanding the fact that he had been given the Christian names of the late King Edward by a loyal and emotional mother, Creston had inherited Radicalism as some men inherit bronchitis. It was a disease. It is always a disease, and renders those unfortunate creatures who suffer from it unpleasant to the senses and a nuisance to the land. Like all Radicals, his one overwhelming ambition was to be a wealthy man and live in a house built by himself on land of his own—an ugly, blatant, bald house, with pillars, and lions rampant, and rhododendrons in a stiff garden laid out in card-back patterns. This achieved, on the linoleum that he invented himself, his next natural Radical ambition was to be a member of Parliament, where he might, when permitted, harangue an empty house on the iniquities of wealth and the possession of land and titles, and, eventually, by supplying the party with election funds, rise Sir Albert Creston, Knight. All these ambitions, by every known Radical effort and trick, had been achieved, except the one which necessitated the wearing of black velvet and silver buckles and receiving the royal tap upon his shoulder. The last was, however, inevitable. His second large cheque had recently been endorsed by the Chief Radical Whip. Everything that Creston had done was Radical and understandable and to the type—except one. This was his daughter Edith. How such a man, married to such a wife, born and brought up in an atmosphere of linoleum and the portrait of Gladstone, of smug pharisaicalism and business sharpness, came to be the father of this very nice little girl is one of those things that no fellow can understand. Conceive a dainty

opera being composed on a harmonium, or a party of light-hearted Irish people going to kiss the Blarney stone in a hearse!

George's mother, wearing mauve for the day, received them in the hall, and being, as she had always been, extremely frightened by their bold, pillar-like, lion-rampant appearance, passed them on, as quickly as she could, to the little grey woman. In a tailor-made dress, with men's pockets and a white linen collar and red tie, Lady Emily was able to tackle not merely the Crestons, but the whole of the Radical party with supreme ease. She revelled in the Crestons, and so worded her sarcasms that they seemed to be compliments and congratulations. To Clive, whose sense of humour was almost uncomfortably keen, the most exquisitely funny thing of that funny day was when Lady Emily addressed the super-Radical as Lord Creston in a beautifully simulated moment of mental aberration and with a huge wink at her neighbour. From that moment she held the Crestons in the palm of her hand and won a promise from her nephew's father-in-law of all the linoleum that was needed to cover the floors of the shop-girls' club in Sumptermead. He had never given a square foot of the stuff away before.

The Mayor, a supremely honest, hard-working, utterly mistaken, hunx-like man, with legs so bandy that they seemed to be deformed, drove up in a fly, wearing a comic tall hat and his imposing chain of office. His wife, a woman whose intuition and humour made her an object of suspicion in her set, suggested that this chain would be just as safe at home as round her husband's neck. The answer was characteristic of the best provincialism. "What? You're mad, Maud! How's anybody to know what I am unless I show 'em?" Had she known that in addition to the chain round his neck his worship had put the notes of a speech in his pocket

that would take an hour to deliver, she would have developed a sudden attack of neuralgia that would have necessitated immediate medical treatment and a darkened room.

One of the most inspiring moments of that day was the arrival of the Cheshire Yeomanry, of which George and Clive were officers. In full blaze of uniform they trotted across the park on an odd but anxious assortment of horses, many of which performed useful domestic jobs, such as pulling butchers' carts, farmers' wagons and fire-engines, when not soldiering. They were in command of the adjutant, a cousin of George's, and were officered, and well officered, by the sons of the county people, whose liberality made it possible for the corps to exist. They had come to form a guard of honour for George, for whom they all had a great liking, and during the ceremony the officers were to line the aisle of the church and to make a temporary and gleaming roof of swords under which the bride and bridegroom were to pass.

The house guests, a well-fed, well-dressed, sleek, impersonal, typical, best-family crowd, including the Lord Lieutenant of the county, who flirted with all the pretty girls; the Member of Parliament, a young, baby-faced man with rebellious curly hair and a high-pitched giggle, whose tie continually rode up at the back, and all the hen-like elderly ladies who do so much to render county life bright and dangerous by circulating circumstantial evidence about every other family, gathered on the terrace, which had not known such colour, laughter and cheery, inane county chatter for many a long day. Clive and Lady Emily played up like men, re-introduced people who had ceased to be on speaking terms, showed great politeness to new-comers as to whom the evergreens and perennials had turned down their thumbs, and with beautiful unconsciousness put their feet up to the knees into

the hundred and one little necessary intricacies of county life. It was all very delightful, and uniquely English.

A burst of cheering greeted George and his little preening girl as they came out of the church—George grinning like a great St. Bernard dog and metaphorically wagging a fine tail. The band played "See the Conquering Hero Comes," and the yeomanry saluted. All the way through the park to the house the drive was lined with village and townspeople and school-children, who, with shrill, thin cheers, threw flowers at the feet of the happy pair. These two, according to ancient custom, walked the whole way, leading a procession of relatives and friends. George, nervous, amused, sheepish, proud and self-conscious, kept up an incessant rattle.

"Darlin' kid, how sweet you look. Oh, good lord! what a row! That man with the cornet'll bust his cheeks. Wish some of these fellows 'ud put their belts on straight. Do you know, for one ghastly moment I thought dear old Clive had lost the blessed ring. All bridegrooms have that rotten feelin', don't they? But there, how should you know? Wait till I get you safe in a lonely corner without that veil—if there is a lonely corner anywhere to-day. My word! just look at all these people. An avenue of 'em, three deep, slap up to the house. Isn't it an awful business! Smile at 'em, dear. Smile like a Cheshire cat. You'll never be a cat, but you're wholly Cheshire now, eh what? Ah, Green, there you are, then. Saw me christened, didn't you? Hope to Heaven the dear old beggar won't see me buried. That old man taught me to fish. A perfect wonder with the gaff. I'll teach you to fish soon, baby, eh? Oh, how de do, Mrs. Bagley. Thank you very much, yes. Thank you. Haven't the ghost of a notion what she's sayin', but it's a safe answer. By Jove! I'm hungry. I could eat a sheep. I think I got an appetite

worryin' about the replies to the vicar. I very nearly kissed you when you said 'I do.' Your lips looked like the heart of a rose. Hullo! young Stacks! You've rolled up, then. Come and see me some time this afternoon about that job. Righto! Corkin' boy, that. Son of people who have been on the estate as long as we have. His health hasn't been good and he had to leave the army. Must do something for him. Darlin' thing, I hope you won't be seasick to-morrow going across. We're goin' to be very happy, you and I, aren't we? I shall be glad to get back and settle down. It's all goin' to be a honeymoon. Look at all these townees with tufts of hair stickin' out under their caps. Makin' fun of me, most of 'em, silly young asses. Modern products, eh? Very different from the simple villagers, who think I'm a corker, what? Hurrah! not much farther to go now. Put on all the frills you know with the county women, my dear. Begin with your little nose in the air. It's the only way. Otherwise they'll boss you. Oh, my lord, I'm gettin' an appallin' needle about my speech at the breakfast. I think Aunt Em might have let me off that business. Good! Now turn round and give your best bow. That's rippin'. Jove, how well old Cheshire can cheer when it wants to. And now follow me quick. There's the library and not a soul in it. I'm goin' to give you a kiss if I'm hanged for it." . . .

Lady Emily escaped from the crowded terrace for a moment. She guessed where her sister was and found her wiping her eyes. "My dear," she said, "my dear," and put her arms round her.

"Thank you, dear Em, you're very good to me."

"Who wouldn't be good to you! So *that* boy's safely married, thank God."

"Yes, thank God. I hope he'll be as happy as he can.

She's a dear little girl. But do you think she'll see that he wears proper underclothing, Em?"

"Not a doubt of it. She loves him, you see. Well, now we've got to see about Clive, and then our job will be done."

"Yes, now we must think about Clive, and then we can go, can't we? Is my nose red, Em?"

"No, dear, and if it is, the county won't put it down to drink in your case. So don't worry. We must get back, or some of 'em will begin to work off old scores. What a lot!"

The Lord Lieutenant, having hobbled through a would-be facetious speech, found himself inextricably tied up in a string of words, became panicky, left off abruptly and resumed his chair. There was a polite volley of applause from the two hundred people who were sitting down to the old-fashioned wedding-breakfast in the old dining-hall. Under the tattered banners that hung from the worn beams, there was the county, direct relations most of them of the men and women who had done themselves well at the wedding-breakfasts of the Hurberts who looked down sympathetically upon the pleasant scene from their frames on the walls.

And then George reluctantly gathered his long body together and stood up, sheepishly, and as red as a beetroot. He didn't wait for the applause—the yeomanry officers cheered—to subside.

. . . "And so on" (he was heard to say). "I'm sure that my little gel—I mean my wife—joins me warmly, and I may say gratefully, in thanking the Lord Lieutenant for his more than kind, and I may say eloquent, words, and all that. It's a pretty bad thing to be married—I mean, of course, to walk the gauntlet of one's village friends and the people from the town, and then to stand on one's hind legs and make a complete

ass—I mean of course fool—of oneself before the rest of 'em—by that I mean one's friends and neighbours, and all that. But if I had to go through it again I'd choose the same little gel, and I don't mind who knows it. I'm sure that my missus—that is my wife—and I are very glad indeed to see you all to-day, watchin' us turned off and so on, and grateful to you for botherin'. In Cheshire we stand by each other in times of trouble, don't we? I may say that I shall do my best, when I come back, to take up my job here, and fix an eye on the hunt and keep the old flag flying, so to speak—and—all that, and if I can occupy the place my dear old father filled half as well I shall be thunderin' glad, by which I mean, of course, extremely glad and satisfied. It only remains for me to say thank you—because, to tell the truth, I've clean forgotten the toppin' speech I've been muggin' up for a week—and—I say it. Thank you."

"You darling!" whispered the new Duchess.

"Oh, my Lord!" said George.

Clive was howling with laughter.

Out in the park the town band was playing, or rather rendering, "Tom Bowling," with variations, many of them spontaneous, and the swings were going incessantly and the roundabouts were permitted no rest. And down upon the ever-shifting crowd, lighted up here and there by the colour of uniforms, the golden autumn sun fell softly, and a breeze in which there was a suspicion of the unpreventable winter sent the brown leaves flying off the trees under whose old limbs many former dukes had been carried to church to be christened, married and put to everlasting rest. On the terrace Clive was surrounded by a bevy of pretty bridesmaids, but as he nodded to their chatter his thoughts were with Helena. If fate had been less apparently cruel there might have

been a double wedding that day, and on the same train, but a different carriage, that carried George and Edith to London, she—she with her lovely face like a starry flower, she whom he adored with all the passion of his soul. . . .

And upstairs in his dressing-room, George stood in front of a looking-glass, putting on a new and disagreeable tie. There was a resolute tap on the door.

"Come in," he said. "Damn the blessed thing!"

"It's me," said Lady Emily. "Just a final word, old boy."

"I should think so. Curse this tie. Dear Aunt Em, as usual. You've done the trick. Everything's gone off as smooth as velvet. You're a Briton and I'm awful grateful."

"That's all right, Georgie. Any little thing like that, y'know. Well, then, good luck and God bless you and the girl."

George turned and put his great hard arm round the shoulder of the little grey woman. "I believe God *is* goin' to bless me and my gel," he said, with not a very steady voice. "I shied at the whole thing at first, as you know. The idea of marryin' for cold, beastly cash was a filthy one, and it got on my nerves a bit, though it had to be done if this old place was to keep its end up in these tax-ridden times. But I love the kid now. She's—well, she's a good 'un, Aunt, and I find that I need her, so God *has* blessed us both, eh?"

The little grey woman stood on tiptoe and kissed him. "Ah, that's good," she said. "That's mighty good, and Georgie, if you think I really have put this show through all right, will you make me a little promise in return? Say no, if you'd rather."

"I say yes, at the top of my voice. Ra—ther! What is it?"

She paused a moment. She found it just a little difficult to speak. "Well, y'see, my boy, I . . . I shall never have any children of my own, except my puppies and foals, and I've got a fancy to dandle on my old knee a little warm thing called Emily, that'll put her chubby fingers up to my mouth to be kissed. If . . ."

George put his hand on her shoulder.

And then the mother halted for a moment at the door and George went over to her quickly.

The motor was waiting. The crowd, with rice and an old shoe, were all heaped about it. The band, with an abysmal lack of tact, was playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me." The terrace was lined with the house guests. The yeomanry were drawn up, with slightly slanted headgear, to ride with the car to the park gates. The sun had passed.

Edith, with the mother, the little grey lady, Clive and the Cranstons, was at the bottom of the stairs.

George shook hands with the butler, on whose back he had ridden as a boy, with the housekeeper out of whom he had been wont to wheedle things to eat, and then strode across to Clive, whose arm he took.

By accident, the two boys stood beneath the last portrait of their father.

"Well, Clive, my dear old man, that's over."

"Yes. Good luck, George."

"Don't leave England or—anything till I come back."

"I'll send you a wire if . . ."

"No. Wait. I ask it as your—pal."

"Right you are, old man."

"Thanks. Well . . ."

"Well . . ."

"So long, then."

"So long, then."

When the car rolled through the park gates, George said again: "Will you, Baby?"

"No," said Edith, "not yet, darling."

"Well, if I turn off the light?"

"Er . . . yes. A quick one."

The light went out for a moment. "My little wife!" he said. "My own little, wee wife!"

IV

THAT night Clive sat in his room and listened in vain for George's heavy tread on the stairs. He felt very alone and young and emotional. George was his best pal. He was a great fellow, and the way in which he had knuckled down to the duty of leading the family when he might so easily have succumbed to the callous, individualistic modern spirit and let things slide while he carried out his hobbies, inspired Clive. He metaphorically took off his hat to the big, simple, red-headed man who had deliberately turned his marriage of convenience into a marriage of love. He asked himself what he would have done if he had been Duke with Helena reigning in his heart, and drawing his soul and body to her side every moment of the day and night. He would have been faced with the same problem. He would have been obliged, if honest, to bring money into the family by the only means possible to him—marriage. He shuddered to think what his feelings would have been if he had left for a honeymoon that afternoon with a girl like Edith when he belonged by nature and by desire to another girl. The very thought was appalling. He thanked God with all his heart that he had not been called upon to play any such ghastly part—to go through life a pretender, a masquerader,

despising himself, pitying his so-called wife, detesting his position.

As it was, George, Duke of Cheshire, was married. In the natural order of things he would be blessed with children, with a son and heir. As second son, Clive was freer, and less responsible now than ever before. So far as the family was concerned, he no longer counted. He was a free-lance. He could go and come as he liked. He could realize the sum from which he derived his income, go out to Canada, buy land, colonize and either marry and have a family of his own, or remain a bachelor and return to die and to be buried in the family vault, or be laid in a grave beneath one of his own trees. It didn't matter. His ancestors did not look to him to continue the direct line. He was the master of his fate, the captain . . .

And here his thoughts stopped abruptly. Once before, only a few short months ago, he had said these confident words, in self-congratulation, and a moment later God had proved to him the utter fallacy of any such idea, and had attached him indissolubly, whether he ever lived with her or not, to the girl whose spirit had come to him, in his best moments, ever since he had been a boy. No man in this life is the master of his fate, the captain of his soul. No one has seen to-morrow. Not one action that a man may do can affect himself only. No debt can be entered into the bill for which will not be presented to someone. No one can even be despised without some portion of his shame acting upon the heart of someone else. No man is born into this world whose smile does not lighten one empty life, whose angry words do not cut into someone's flesh, or whose hand, even if it is ineffectual, does not leave its mark somewhere. Not a single thought or deed passes aimlessly. All are drawn on the bank of humanity, and, when inevitably presented, met.

Clive was too young and too unsuffered to know these things. Life had been too easy. It had been rather in the nature of a series of games laid out on a plan, the set, orthodox, family plan, each one played in a charming atmosphere, with men who knew, even if they did not abide by, the rules. All that he did realize at that moment was that the unseen hand is sooner or later laid suddenly on every man's shoulder, and what has not been, or not allowed to be, obvious before is then made clear and unmistakable. In one breath he told himself that he was freer than when he had left home and gone to Dover with the undiscovered world lying beyond the horizon, and in the next he congratulated himself in being no more free than George who had just vowed a lifelong service to Edith. He congratulated himself because although Helena was not for him, she was his because, if he never touched her with his lips again, he and she had loved and met and re-loved and their spirits were joined. It was the miracle of love.

He had arrived at this conclusion by stages, during the months that had gone since he left Helena in London. And what had helped to bring it about more than anything else was the reading of all the letters that she had written to him in that little book which had given the vicar's wife so much uneasiness. The beauty and simple faith of these, the intimate confessions of a virgin love, the mystery and wonder that surrounded her certain knowledge that somewhere in the world he lived and returned her love, lifted up his soul.

He didn't intend to drift and hang about aimlessly, drone-like and decorative, any longer. Now that George's marriage was over, he was going to put his hand to something, to justify himself, to do something useful for Helena's sake. If his education, which had taught him nothing, would not allow him to become one of London's workers for a wage, why, then he would

attach himself to the body of honorary people who worked for the workers. He had, in fact, made arrangements to represent George in his capacity of President of the Hospital for Crippled Children. In the morning he was going to London to start a campaign to raise funds for a new and very necessary wing and for the endowment of another series of cots. He intended to throw himself into this scheme heart and soul, not so that he might, in a spirit of self-pity, occupy his mind, but in gratitude to God for allowing him to meet the woman he loved and who loved him.

At the moment when the cold October dawn crept up from the east, giving a new day life and light, and Clive blew out his candles and went to bed, Helena sat at her writing-table in her beautiful room at Cardinals and read a letter that she had just written, the words of which were still wet.

"I can't bear the hideousness of all this any longer. He knows, by the use of his oriental cunning, that I write to you every day and that every day your letter comes to me. His fiendish cruelty and suspicion, all done in his calculating and silky way, are killing me. You must take me away. This marriage is a sham, a horror. I have tried to be brave all these months. I have been one of his nurses as well as I could out of pity for him and love for you. But he said things to me to-night that stain my soul. Take me away, Clive, for God's sake, and let me see the sun again and health and be young. I love! I love you! Your brother is married and you are free. Come and take me and set me free too."

V

WHEN Clive's father died and put the little soft lady into perpetual mourning, Mr. Alfred Beard, his valet, begged leave to retire from Sumptermead. He had been attached to the Duke, in person and by heart, for twenty-five years. He was his first master. He had a feeling that he could not serve another man. So he proposed marriage to the middle-aged daughter of Corstey, the grain and seed merchant in the High Street, took her for a short honeymoon to Margate-on-Sea, and, having made a complete study of the streets within touch of the London clubs, signed a long lease of number 90, Bury Street, St. James's, and let all his neatly-furnished rooms to single gentlemen. He and his wife, who never quite recovered from the honour he had done her and was never tired of listening to Beard's intimate and graphic story of the Duke and his ways, lived in the basement of this old, narrow house. Mrs. Beard, being an illimitable cook with a passion for nice linen, helped to make her husband's new profession a steady success. Number 90, Bury Street, was famous among army and navy officers and second sons, and not once, after his first year, was Beard obliged to hang the printed card upon which the word "Rooms" was printed in the window of the front sitting-room. It was natural that in due course George should take up his London quarters at this address, and then Clive. And it was pleasant for them both to find themselves surrounded by reminders of their father and of the old place on the walls of this quiet, pedantically-run little house.

A characteristic conversation was conducted—the Beards hardly ever merely talked—in the basement one evening after Clive had been with them again for a week. His day's work done and his three gentlemen being out,

Beard sat in a slippery horse-hair arm-chair in front of the fire, enjoying a pipe of good smoking mixture. He had on a worn black velvet jacket, a black tie, evening-dress trousers and a pair of bead slippers, all the former property of his clients. His pipe was a Christmas present from Clive, the Doulton-ware tobacco-pot a gift from George and the smoking mixture a small douceur from the Major who had occupied the top rooms for fifteen years.

Mrs. Beard, in mauve silk, with real lace fichu, sat near by, cross-stitching the letter B rather, perhaps, too floridly—it might easily have been mistaken for a tramp steamer in a storm, or a straight-back man with a double chin and a corporation in a fernery—upon a new towel. There had been a long silence, while Beard had been masticating the excellent contents of the *Pall Mall Gazette,* fiery leader and all. When at last he spoke, Mrs. Beard knew that she had been right in her supposition that her good man was worrying about something. There was a note of deep anxiety in his voice.

"My dear," he said, puffing deliberately. "He's at work."

"Who, dear?"

"Why, Lord Clive."

"You don't say so!"

"Ah, but I do. I suspected it the day after he came back. He had a funny sort of set look about him that was new. He wasn't his old self one bit. Not that he'd changed in his nice ways with me—he hadn't. Not that he seemed melancholy or depressed. He didn't. But—well, he walked quicker, and when he went out—I watched him up the street—it wasn't in his usual easy-going, nowhere-in-particular way, as if he'd bought the earth but wasn't going to brag about it, but as if he was going somewhere specifically to do something. It gave me a nasty uneasy feeling."

"I don't wonder, dear. Well?"

"Well, I've watched him closely since then, and I find that he goes out every morning after breakfast at half-past nine, and gets back, like clock-work, at quarter to six—same as a clerk might, or a stockbroker, or one of that sort. Now, yesterday I says to myself, What's his lordship up to? Why are the cuffs of his shirt dirty as if he'd been sitting at a desk, writing? He's always hated writing, and bar a letter now and then to his mother or Lady Em, or a pal abroad, never touched a pen."

"No, that's true, dear."

"So, being in a sort of a way one of the family, I followed him out yesterday."

"You didn't!"

"Yes, I did. I thought it were my duty. And what do you think I found? Well, it's no good arsting you to guess. You wouldn't find the answer if I give you till next Saturday night, not even with the guide to acrostics. He went to the 'Orspital for Crippled Children, marched up the steps, giving good morning to the door-keeper, and disappeared into the orfice."

"You don't say so!"

"But I *am* saying so. It's the truth. Not satisfied with that—although that looked bad enough—I put a few questions to the man. 'Ain't that Lord Clive Hurbert,' I says to 'im. 'It is,' he says. 'Ah, a splendid young gentleman,' I says. 'I served his father,' I says. 'Did you, though?' he says. 'I did so,' I says. 'And what may he have to do with this here 'orspital?' I says. He smiled. 'A good deal,' he says. 'He's acting President and he's making things buzz fine,' he says, 'and about time too. We wanted 'im, and so did all the little cripples as is waiting ten deep for cribs 'ere.' 'Oh,' says I. 'That's it, is it?' And I give him a bob and walks back. And all the way 'ome I says to myself—Well, Beard, what would the old Duke have 'ad to say to this!

A sign of the times? Well, I should think so. Lord Clive Hurbert a working man, much the same as a man in the street. I don't know if he's drawing a salary for what he's doing, I'm sure. That 'ud be the last word. But for Lord Clive Hurbert, son and brother of a duke, to go down every day regular, clerk-like, and put his nose down over a desk. Well, all I can say is, England is not what it used to be. Dear, I'm diddled. That's what I am. I'm fairly diddled. And, comfortable and happy though you make me, I lay awake at night and arst myself the same question over and over again: What's it mean? . . . Lord Clive, who has never done nothing, same as he ought to do, with such an air! Lord Clive, who went out into the day as if a hundred years was time enough—sitting down to work, the same as you and me and all the others. . . . I don't like the look of it, my dear, either for him or the country. I don't indeed."

But the hospital liked the look of it, and the poor little children with twisted and withered limbs liked the look of Clive. For Clive not only put his whole back into his work, drawing the much-needed money from his friends by his charming and sympathetic appeals, but he devoted several hours a day to the inmates of that good house whose chance in life had gone at the beginning of it. He sat among a wide-eyed bevy of those of the children who hopped about on crutches and told them stories that fired their imaginations and charmed away their monotonous hours. He stood by the cribs of those of them who were slowly recovering from operations and brought smiles back to their wan faces. He interviewed mothers whose little ones had been knocked over suddenly by passing carts and brought crumpled to the hospital, and sent them out in better heart. He set on foot among his friends who "did things" a plan for a series of afternoon entertainments in the play-ward

which should take place once a week during the winter months, and brought into the place an atmosphere so energetic and cheery, so full of enthusiasm and purpose, that it was caught by doctors and nurses as well as the children and the secretary. Subscriptions, which in the necessary competition of hospitals, had been hard to obtain, began to come in steadily. He used his personal influence upon everyone he had ever met and drew up a pamphlet, illustrated with photographs of some of the worst cases, that was calculated to draw money from a miser. One week of his indefatigable and imaginative work had set the ball rolling merrily, and the prospect of the new wing, which had looked so gloomy before his breezy advent, actually began to assume shape.

It was curious to see this well-set-up, good-looking, immaculate fellow, who, if he had followed the example of his set, would have been learning soldiering in the Guards, or lunching chorus girls at the Savoy, or wandering aimlessly and listlessly through life in clubs, suddenly devoting nearly all his time to such work as this. What peculiar back-water had the stream of English life drifted into that such men as Clive, who were neither sailors, nor soldiers on the Indian frontier where there was real soldiering to do, were created derelicts and left high and dry on the mud banks? Before the commercialization of the House of Commons had been brought about by the payment of members—a fatal scheme which in the history of all parliaments spelt the utter loss of honest independence, and the introduction of the party-political hucksterers who answered to the crack of the whip like brainless sheep, and so allowed the government of the country to fall into the hands of a few unscrupulous leaders whose ambitions were to obtain personal advancement and personal advertisement—Parliament was theirs by right of birth, leisure and patriotism, whatever their party might have been. To-day no

man with any self-respect can go into the House of Commons. It is undermined by the grabbing spirit of the parish council, and conducted on the lines of those slap-dash, temporary, farcical and yet dangerous parliaments of small revolutionary countries which are constantly on the verge of outbreaks. It is permeated with an indifference so cynical and callous, infested with men so unpatriotic and selfish, that its prestige has totally disappeared, and its influence in England and with foreign countries has faded away.

Clive dined that evening with the Cranstons in their new house in Rutland Gate. They had bought it cheap from a peer who sold it in order to educate his sons. Mrs. Cranston had been torn between a desire for a new and up-to-date house in Brook Street, and the one which carried the prestige of an old name. Her husband's deep-rooted radicalism had settled the question, and he had written his cheque without a regret. Clive saw to it that he also wrote a nice cheque made out to the hospital and this he carried home with satisfaction and triumph. Instead of finding his sitting-room in its usual neat bachelor loneliness, his eyes met those of Lady Emily, who was standing rather grimly with her back to the fire. The little room was filled with the aroma of cigarettes, whose gold-tipped ends made a small pile in an ash-tray.

The apparition of the little grey lady was so unexpected that Clive's thoughts ran anxiously to his mother. "My dear Aunt Em," he said. "This is great."

"Oh," she said dryly. "Is it?"

"Well, rather. You—in London. It's epoch-making. No bad news, I hope?"

"You mean the mother? No, she's well and has just accepted an invitation from Cousin Honoria Lassiter to knit twenty woollen vests for the young females of the

West Coast of Africa. Knowing nothing more of the wardrobe of those dark persons than one may gather from photographs, I am asking myself under what garment they will wear them. Perhaps you'd better open the window. I've smoke-dried this place."

"Oh, that's all right. I like it. Have my most comfortable chair."

"Thank you, not yet," said Lady Emily. "Presently, if you have the goodness to ask me, I'll take it with pleasure. I've been standing here for an hour waiting for you, and I'm suffering from the incipient stages of housemaid's knee—whatever that may be."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Clive. "Why didn't you send me a wire? We would have dined somewhere and gone to a show. How long are you up for?"

Lady Emily lit another cigarette. Her expression puzzled Clive. For the first time in his life he fancied that she looked uncomfortable.

"This morning," she said, "I deliberately played the liar. I told your mother that I had to attend the annual meeting of the Kennel Club. It doesn't come off till the middle of next month. I couldn't tell her that I wanted to see you, because she would have asked me why."

"Why shouldn't she?"

"Because what I have to say to you, my dear, must be said to you and to you only."

Clive laughed. There was something extremely comical about the little grey lady's rueful face and the evident difficulty of coming to her point.

"Anyone would think you had something on your mind," he said.

"Well, anyone would be wrong. What I've got is on my chest, and I may tell you that the damned thing has been burning me for several days like a mustard-plaster. But don't stand for me. Sit down, but not too near any

throwable thing. Strange as it may seem, I still have a sneaking regard for my head."

So Clive sat down, laughing. What was all this?

For a moment there was silence in that rather nice little room, with its powder-wood panelling, painted white with a dull egg-shell finish, its blue carpet and its plain oak furniture and blue plates in a rack between the windows. A large photograph, from an oil portrait of Clive's father, hung over the fireplace, plainly framed, and a line of books on fly-fishing, Braid on golf, and big game hunting, and so on, stood cheerfully on side tables. Pipes and two large tins of pipe mixture, a box or two of cigarettes and a large silver cigar box stood about, near to hand.

A taxi-cab went swiftly down the slight incline towards St. James's Square, grinding its brake, and in the area of the next house two cats were conducting a love passage with the usual feline indifference of public opinion.

Lady Emily's clear, incisive voice came again. "Clive, dear, I have to confess to a very dirty trick. The morning after you left us, very happy because you had gone to put your hand to an admirable job, several letters came for you by the first post. I duly re-addressed them and put them in my pocket. I intended to ride into the town to catch the mid-day post with them, and give Mrs. Brownstack a bit of undiluted Hades for not having sent the remains of the cakes to the workhouse. . . . You know my habits, my dear boy, no one better. You know that I am always up and about long before anybody else. When one is going down the hill one can't afford to sleep the valuable hours away. That being so, it is I who sort out the letters and put them on the breakfast-table. Since you came back from Dover I have put a daily letter on your plate from Cardinals.

The handwriting is very familiar, therefore. . . . Do you see what I'm trying to tell you, Clive, my dear?"

"No," said Clive.

"Thank you. But you don't know women, and you don't know me, and there never was a woman quite so much of a woman as I am, in spite of my stucco of mannishness. I was damn jealous of the girl who wrote to you with such beastly regularity. Also, I knew, because you had been good enough to tell me, in what circumstances she was placed, and my eyes, which don't miss much, saw very plainly the struggle you've been going through all the summer. . . . One of those letters that I re-addressed was from Cardinals, and—I didn't post it. Now throw that tobacco tin, but don't hit me very hard, Clivey, because I love you, dear."

Clive sat up. "But if you didn't post it, what did you do with it?" It was far too precious to lose.

Lady Emily's small capable hand went up to the breast-pocket of her mannish coat. "I carried it about with me for days, hating myself and hating the letter. All my pups avoided me and sat in the farthest corners of their kennels, eyeing me with surprise and pain. My temper was vile and my English unprintable. Then I got up in the middle of the night, having a frightful feeling that it contained something that would ruin your life—and—*opened it.*"

Clive got up. "You opened it?"

He spoke quietly, but the reproach in his voice was more than the little grey woman could bear. She made a sort of pathetic rush at him, put her arms all about him, and hid her face on his shoulder. "Don't," she cried brokenly, "don't! You're my boy. I love you more than anyone on earth. I've been in terror ever since you told me about this girl. If you ran away with her and sullied your name, I should just crack up and die. Clive, Clive, my darling son, my own boy, I felt that

that letter called you. I *had* to open it, and I *had* to hold it back. But I'm a proud old woman whose fingers are clean, and I believe in you. I couldn't bear to touch or see the thing a moment longer, whatever you may do. So I've come to hand it over. Take it."

Standing very straight, Clive read Helena's appeal. . . . His blood surged into his head, an amazing light blazed in his eyes. "My God!" he said, "this was written a week ago." He turned and left the room.

Five minutes later, carrying a thick coat, he walked quickly into the garage at the bottom of Bury Street. A man sat in a small office, reading a paper. The place reeked of cheap tobacco, rubber tyres and the fumes of an oil stove. Pictures of actresses cut from a magazine were stuck on the wooden wall with pieces of stamp paper.

"I want a car, at once."

"Very good, sir." The man took up a speaking-tube and blew hard. "Tumble up, Jack," he said. "You're wanted." . . . "Going far, sir?"

"To Sussex. A place about eight miles from Lewes. Don't waste time, please." That letter was a week old!

"Right you are, sir. The chauffeur won't be more than ten minutes." He darted a sidelong look at the man who wanted to take a midnight drive, went out into the yard and set to work on a large roadster.

Clive, with his blood on fire, filled with rage and joy, paced up and down. He was vaguely aware of the sudden presence of another man, of the sound of the rapid pulse of an engine, and the glare of two headlights which threw great round patches of white on the dirty wall—and of talking and footsteps.

Then the man from the office, whose voice was round and pleasant like his face, spoke: "All ready, sir."

Clive made for the car.

"I'll just take your name and address, sir, please."

Clive gave them, and turned to the car again.

"You'll wear your coat, sir. Allow me."

Clive hesitated.

"Why, certainly. There's a sharp wind to-night, and the glass is low."

Clive submitted, and as soon as he was in, bent forward and touched the muffled-up chauffeur on the shoulder. "Go like the devil," he said. "I'm a whole week late."

The chauffeur laughed and shook his head, sent the car out into Bury Street and round towards St. James's Square.

The clerk watched it till it disappeared. "Um!" he thought, "which is it? Death . . . or love?"

VI

THE great city was going reluctantly to sleep. Some of her night birds still flitted about, in a last desperate hope of finding something on which to feed. Men with overcoats tightly buttoned hurried homewards from supper. Policemen, silently shod, threw spot lights on shop-door locks and tried their handles. Intermittent taxi-cabs sped along the shining streets, and in many windows lights were burning. The car, running smoothly, headed for the river.

But Clive had no eyes for the majesty of the night, with her young slim moon, star surrounded, and her mother hand which soothed the restless, nervous earth into a brief peacefulness. His spirit flew ahead of the car, like a moth attracted by its glaring eyes, and his soul was filled with a great joy, a supreme desire. As he was taken forward he seemed to leave behind him among the maze of buildings, among all the conventions

that had been built up so insecurely, like children's brick houses, his places, his ideas, his mental struggles. Let fate say yes or no, let George and Lady Em and his mother and public opinion pass judgment as they might, he was on his way to Helena, and body and spirit he rushed to answer to her call. What work was there finer for him to do in all his life than rescue the girl he loved to immortality from her prison? He stood alone. He was free. He was no longer responsible to his family. As second son, his brother married, he could make his life in any part of the earth that he chose to adopt. With Helena, who claimed him and to whom he belonged, fulfilment lay ahead. With her, by her side, in step through the years, the meaning and the purpose, the great riddle was solved. He and she had been born under the same star. From the different portions of the earth on which they had been placed their spirits had gone out in search of each other. With the unerring and inexplainable certainty of psychic force they had claimed each other years before. As he was free for her, so she was free for him, because her marriage was a mere form, a contract that could not be held binding by anyone and not even by the law, if it were set in motion.

So ran Clive's thoughts in tune to the steady powerful beat of the car's engine. And then, with all the strength of passion in them, they outdistanced the car, leaving it farther and farther behind on the long white road lined with gaunt trees, whose bare autumn branches stood out against the cold clear sky like frost-lace upon a window-pane.

The clock in the tower of the old parish church of Lewes struck four as the car flew like a great bee along its dark and silent High Street. The light from the infrequent lamp-posts fell on shuttered shops. No one

stirred in all the town, which even when awake went torpidly through its days, like an over-fat man, except the village policeman, who, with a curious but well-trained retriever at his feet, stood under the shadow of a wall, smoking a quiet pipe. Out in the country again the Sussex downs, as smooth as the rough skin of an elephant, humped themselves against the sky. The wind, blowing from the sea, was tinged with salt. Clive caught it in his nostrils and his heart leapt. The sea, the horizon . . . and beyond it, with Helena, at last. . . .

The barking of surprised dogs, chained to tubs, marked the car's triumphant progress through two villages, and when it stopped, perspiring, at the great gates of Cardinals the blinking eye of day opened in the east.

With a sort of impatient surprise that he had gone faster than nature, Clive got out, told the chauffeur to wait, and stood gazing blankly at the dim outline of the famous house. Good heavens! hours must be killed before he could drive in, lift Helena from the room in which she had been caged, and take her away for ever. There had been no need to rush out of London in that mad haste now to cool his heels. But Helena had called a week ago and he had tried to overtake those lost days. Here was delay. Here he must wait outside the harbour, like a ship for the tide. Passion urged him, and the tempestuous movement of his blood made delay irksome beyond the faculty of words. He paced, like a sentry, up and down the road, formulating no plans, because it did not seem to him that plans were necessary. Helena had called and he had answered her call. At the right moment he would go in and effect the rescue. After that, no human hand should separate them. Their only enemy would be death.

And as he walked, star after star went out, their duty done, and the moon paled before the gradual rising of her brother. Little by little the thin white dawn

widened and spread. Away in the distance a cock crew, saluting the birth of day. From place to place the crowing spread, like bugle calls calling camps to stir. Birds awoke as the cold light drove the night away like smoke before a breeze, and behind the downs a faint blush rose into the sky. Shy day had been caught by them in all her nakedness.

VII

THE car had gone back to the nearest village. The chauffeur was to have breakfast and wait at the inn. At ten o'clock Clive opened the gates, caring nothing for the odd figure that he cut with a heavy fur coat over evening clothes.

The Tudor house stood in all its beauty among elaborate Italian gardens, with florid stonework and statuary and fountains playing into wide-mouthed basins. Dead leaves scurried across the broad stone walks and dew still sparkled on the black-green of the curiously shaped yews. The morning was dull and muggy, with a leaden sky hanging low.

Her Grace had breakfasted and was reading in the palm court. The name? . . . Oh, would his lordship please to step this way?

Clive followed through hall and library, and finally into a great circular glassed-in conservatory, with pillars and exotic plants and marble figures. The air was heated and unnatural, and filled with the sickly sweet scent of gardenias.

Clive saw the girl's golden head against a background of the thick vivid green of tropical leaves. The man bowed and spoke. He saw her rise and turn. The man said something and went out. A minute later Clive held

her all against him, and kissed her lips like a parched man who finds water in the desert.

"I love you! Oh, my God, I love you!"

"And I love you! I adore you!"

"I only got your letter last night."

"Don't tell me. It isn't necessary."

"It came after I left Sumptermead. It . . . it wasn't forwarded."

"I know. I guessed. I told myself that you would come, and just waited."

He held her back for a moment so that his eyes could feast on her exquisite beauty—her tawny hair and grey eyes that swam with love and trust and joy, her white skin, her parted breathless lips, and her young, sweet, tremulous breast. Then he caught her close again with a sort of choking cry and his arms wound round her shoulders.

There was a small, odd sound, a sort of purring, and then a cold, clear voice: "I think you are making a mistake, sir. That lady is my wife."

Clive looked over Helena's shoulder. He saw the head and trunk of an immaculate man sitting in a little chair on double wheels, with his long, thin, yellow hands on the inner ones, and a blue rug over his useless legs. He felt Helena shudder and cling closer. He held her tighter, putting one hand on her golden head in protection. He had never seen that man with the olive-shaped eyes and black shiny hair, all white at the temples. A sense of interest, impersonal and extraordinary, as though he were looking at a new type, at something that was not all human, pervaded him and held him silent. He noticed the heat behind the yellow of his eyes, the imaginative cruelty of the thin lips, with their small, perfect moustache, as smooth and black as the back of a swift.

Harwich raised his voice. "I beg your pardon. I

didn't know that you were deaf. Permit me to repeat that that lady is my wife."

And then he saw that the upper part of the man's body shook as though from ague, and the black centre of his eyes seemed to have burst into flame. He pulled himself together. . . . Good God! this was Harwich. This was the Oriental creature who had been practising his peculiar cruelties upon Helena in this elaborate prison.

Clive's voice was all unsteady and thick. "You lie!" he said; "this girl is not your wife."

The black man drummed his fingers on the tyres of the wheels which had made the purring sound when he twisted the chair round the great tropical plant, whose flat, fat leaves seemed to be laughing and showing rows of small, sharp teeth.

"I see," he said quietly, distending his nostrils. "In the annals of the Bellendine history there is a chapter in which your family played a part. You were for the red rose and we for the white. One of the Hurberts had his brawling throat slit by one of us as he lay on his bed. I see that brawling remains a characteristic, Lord Clive."

The extreme and effective insolence of the tone and the words cut Clive like a whip. He would have given ten years of his life to have had in front of him a whole man of his own age, so that he might have put his fist with all his weight behind it into that yellow oval face. As he looked at his enemy—the word seemed right—whom the hand of God had punished so dreadfully, he felt ashamed of his outburst. The only weapon against him was a sword-like tongue. He was no match for that. He swallowed back the anger that the sight of this half-man had stirred.

"There shall be no brawl," he said. "I don't suppose Helena will be very long getting ready. I will give

you that amount of time." He let the girl go so that she might slip up to her room.

The Duke seized his opportunity. "The cushion at my back is uncomfortable. Will you be kind enough to put it right, Helena?" he asked.

The girl, without any hesitation, and with the deftness that came from much practice, did what she was told. Harwich caught her by the wrist and held her tight. She made no struggle. She stood at the side of that horrid, effectual chair, all pale, with her large eyes on Clive. If she had been in the grip of a cold and deadly snake she could not have looked more impotent or benumbed.

Harwich laughed a little, and seemed, with an easy masterfulness, to switch the scene into another phase. "You two young things," he said, "take yourselves too seriously, don't you? Now let us be quite quiet and polite and talk the matter over. You see, Hurbert, from many points of view I am, perhaps, the best man in England to have stepped into this—I suppose you would like me to call it romantic little crisis? The word romance covers a multitude of our pleasantest sins, doesn't it? Sit down, now that you are here, and let me give you, as concisely as I can, some very necessary advice. It will be exactly the sort of thing that all law-abiding people will hurry to offer you when you have made its acceptance too late. The peculiarity of advice, as a rule, is that it always comes too late, isn't it?"

Clive remained standing. "It's too late for advice now," he said.

"That, of course, is the correct heroic thing to say, and as a hero I give you my admiration. As a man who knows his world and its laws, written and unwritten, you are very well aware of the hollowness of that interjection, aren't you?"

Clive felt like a bad boy standing in front of a kindly

and pedantic head-master. He resented that man's maimed state with all his soul. There was something incredibly humiliating and ludicrous in being forced to stand in this way before the husband, so-called, of the girl whom he had come to take away. "We are going to take the law into our own hands," he said shortly.

Harwich gave another little laugh. "That, also, is one of the stock heroic sayings. How can you take the law into your own hands? You might as well say that you can emulate Atlas and take the world upon your shoulders." He released Helena, made a long arm and brought a chair close. "Sit here, dear child. You may as well be comfortable. I never can see the particular reason why people should wilfully make themselves uncomfortable because they are romantic."

The horrible advantage that he exercised so quietly and so authoritatively by being an ill man was one which Helena was unable to contest. She did as she was told, with her eyes on Clive. But as she sat there with Harwich's controlling hand on her arm she said to herself, over and over again: "He came when I called. He came when I called."

If anyone had come then upon these three people he must have thought that they were enjoying an amiable conversation.

Harwich eyed Clive too. He detested him for his strength and youth and health, and envied him all those. He was, however, determined to keep Helena. She was his wife, and if he couldn't enjoy her himself, no other man should do so—especially this one. He had suddenly conceived the plan of putting a pin into what he mentally termed their toy balloon. No one could use a pin better.

"Do you know why Helena married me, Hurbert?"

Clive nodded.

"You had the story serially in Helena's daily letters, of course. I couldn't conceive what she found to write

about. Now I understand. Well, worked up by the usual feminine hysterical account of an unhappiness which doesn't in reality exist—Helena has everything that she can desire—even I am ill—you have come at this inconvenient hour to take her away and place her among the women who provide most of the ill-natured gossip of one-half of the world and the proper comment of the other half. Isn't that so?"

"I have come to take her away—yes," said Clive.

"Suppose, having heard me out, that you do. You will wait somewhere, as quietly as you can, for one of two things—divorce or death. Let me tell you that, whatever happens, I shall not divorce. I have no hard and fast views as to the morality or immorality of the business. My only reason for not using the law in this instance will be one that is perfectly human and natural. I shall revenge myself upon you both by making it impossible for you to live with your family and friends in England. As for death—well, I have my doctor's assurance that my disease, if I am careful, will take some years to kill me. If you were in my—chair, I think that your views would be the same, Hurbert."

Clive made no answer. It seemed to him right that this man should fight for his wife, and for the first time he felt some respect for him. But he had made up his mind what he was going to do and nothing could make him alter it. He knew Helena's letter by heart. He *had* to take her away from this brute.

Harwich went on. He had himself so perfectly under control that but for the fact that he watched Clive's eyes with a sort of analytical intensity, he might have been discussing the affairs of three mere acquaintances.

"He came when I called. He came when I called," thought Helena, again and again.

"That being so, you and Helena take the law into your own hands, as you call it. In plain words that

means that you break the established rules of Law and Church, and dodge curious and unkind eyes from one foreign hotel to another, going under an assumed name. Or that, pursuing the policy of the ostrich, which, as you know, hides its foolish head and imagines that its body is unexposed—you settle down in a one-eyed place, thrilling with love and the sense of romance and—have children. Even romance can't alter the ways of nature, though it is responsible for many other almost incredible things. Having no name to give the fruit of your unrecognized union you will then begin—it follows in the inevitable sequence—to ask yourself whether the game has been worth the scandal, and in due course, Lord Clive Hurbert will return alone to civilization and to sense to find a wife, and the Duchess of Harwich will send a humble line to me begging that I will take her back. I agree that there are several variations to the story, but the others are equally unromantic and true."

But neither Clive nor Helena was listening. Clive was asking himself how he could send word to the chauffeur to bring the car up as soon as possible, and Helena was hoping that Clive would take her before crossing the Channel to the Lord Warden Hotel. Somehow it seemed right that they should stay together in the place where they had met.

Not for a single instant did Harwich persuade himself into the belief that his horse sense, or the quiet, realistic painting of an ugly picture, was having the effect he hoped for. One look at Clive's determined expression convinced him to the contrary, and the light in Helena's eyes was too full of ardent love, of tremendous self-sacrifice.

He ceased to talk, and knew that they were unaware of it. Their young, conquering minds were not in his heated palm court, and he was no longer in the scheme of their lives.

And so, for some moments, there was a rare and bizarre silence in the place. Even the red-beaked, tufted, tropical birds held their raucous tongues. Only the soft, incessant splashing of water in a fountain's basin caught the ear. And during this pause Harwich inwardly cursed God and himself—God for having laid His hand upon him, himself for not having given Helena during the honeymoon in Paris a reason for needing his roof.

And then Clive brought his mind back into the court. He was instantly aware of the concentrated venom in Harwich's intent gaze, and of the exquisite passion in Helena's.

He began to speak simply and boyishly, and with no attempt to hide the emotion that seemed to swell in his heart.

"I don't want to make excuses," he said. "I don't think any excuses are necessary. Helena and I have loved each other since we were kids, long before we actually knew each other. It is the thing in both our lives that is good and fine. We don't want you to divorce her or to die. We don't care what people think or are going to say, and honestly you don't count. How can you? You didn't choose to be a husband when you could. I'm awfully sorry to see you ill. We should do what we are going to do now if you were as well as I am. It's *got* to be. We fought against it before, when all we had to do was to catch the next boat to Calais. We have merely thrown away several gorgeous months that can't ever be recovered. If you loved her, it might be different. I don't know that it would, except that you might have had her respect. As it is, I don't think there is any fair man who would ask us to go on living apart, or any decent-minded one who would dare to say that she shall remain in the same house with you. I don't know that there is anything more to say."

He looked at Helena. She got up and went round to him and he took her hand and kissed it. They stood together, young and passionate and conquering.

There had been no such moment in the crowded life of the man who watched them go as that one, and he had made himself a past-master of sensations, a connoisseur of experiences. A sheik by nature, and a despot by upbringing, he knew himself to be impotent, for the first time—helpless, out of count. There was nothing that he could do, or say, or order others to do, or pay them for doing, that could make him have his own way. Youth in all its strength and beauty placed him aside, ignored him and passed him by. The dreadful completeness of his punishment for having spent his own youth so recklessly, and with a viciousness so well thought out, left him utterly silent.

He remained sitting in his chair, a mere brain on wheels, listening to the little raucous cries of his tropical birds, the gentle, persistent splashing of water and the far-off derisive laughter of all the men and women who held his name in detestation.

It was all done quietly and quickly. Neither Clive nor Helena was excited. The hour had come, at last. There was to be no more separation. They were coming together, after all these years of waiting. It was inevitable.

They stood in the hall and talked things over. They might have been married for years. They might have been going to London for a week or two to do the theatres and fulfil engagements. Clive said that his car was waiting in the village. He must find a boy to send for it. Why should he send a boy, when Helena had only to ask to be driven to the village? That was splendid. The man who answered the bell was the one who had posted Helena's daily letters to Clive, and who had taken

Clive to the palm court. His face was impassive and his eyes incurious. The car should be brought round for her Grace at once. The question of Effie then came up. Of course she must be taken. She could be trusted. Trusted? Helena wondered why that word was used. Clive, without self-consciousness, or any hint of discomfort, pointed out that they must think of some name to go under at the "Lord Warden." Effie would hold her tongue. They *were* going to the "Lord Warden"! . . . And it was then that she suddenly tiptoed and kissed his lips, and that he held her tight with all his blood on fire.

To these two young things who had known each other so long and met so short a time before, it seemed right that Clive should wait quietly on the steps of Cardinals while Helena and Effie packed upstairs. What was Cardinals but an hotel, a hospital, or, as in this case, a lunatic asylum in which Helena had been obliged to look after an inmate?

Their attitude was the attitude of youth. Life and the world were theirs, and love the sun that lit their path. In confidence and in triumph they were going out together. Not for them to look timidly or with shame at any pointing finger, nor to detect suspicion in any curious eye. With a fine courage, an impregnable faith in each other, and an invisible belief in the justice of their decision, they were twisting life to suit themselves, remoulding the work of fate into a shape that pleased them best. They threw out no challenge to men and women. With erect heads they ignored them and their judgment. They stood together on the earth which they had conquered. It was fine, staggering, superb—and very youthful.

The car ran smoothly along the wide avenue that skirted the formal gardens. They had no eyes for its elaborate geometrical beauty. They sat hand in hand,

looking at each other. The lowering sky had broken here and there, and a faint gleam of sunlight fell upon the earth, which had resigned itself to the coming of winter. It was like the suggestion of a smile on the face of a sad old man who had achieved ripe age after many joys and griefs, but no philosophy.

"I will leave you at the 'Métropole' in Northumberland Avenue, darling," said Clive, "and then dash round to Bury Street and get my things."

Helena smiled and nodded.

"We shall be able to catch the afternoon train to Dover, and cross in the morning."

"Whatever you say," she replied, tightening her hand. "I am happy at last."

There was only one inn in the village. The car from London was standing in the large shed, where the manger housed spiders. They saw the chauffeur standing, smoking, in the narrow doorway, beneath the roughly painted hanging sign of a bull's head. An old man was sitting on a backless chair in the yard, under the protection of a wall, nursing a new-born baby. He wore a toothless smile of pride.

Clive jumped out as the chauffeur came to meet him. "Get the car out," he said, "and when we've transferred our things we'll make for London as fast as we can."

The man threw a look at Helena. He had asked himself many times, during the night and early morning, what was the reason for "all this." He knew now, and agreed.

The Cardinals chauffeur carried her Grace's baggage to the other car with a puzzled expression. Effie had been seated at his side, but they had spoken of nothing but the weather. They both knew their places and wished the other to know that they did.

While Clive went into the inn to settle his bill, Helena went over to the man who was too old to do anything but

play servant to a baby. "Is it asleep?" she asked in a whisper, bending low.

"Aye, your Grace."

"Newly born?"

"Aye, as new as a young pertater."

He put a soft finger on the shawl that covered the tiny face and drew it gently back.

"It's a boy," she said.

The old man gurgled. "Well, Oi be jagged," he said. "Oi couldn't 'a guessed that fur a pound."

Clive had returned and was holding the door of the car open. She put the shawl back, smiled at the two children and jumped in, all young and glad.

The cars left together, one turning to the right, the other to the left. The other was Clive's.

Clive opened the door of the little house in Bury Street with his latchkey. He caught sight of himself in the looking-glass in the narrow hall. He laughed to see that he was in evening dress. He had forgotten that.

It was unnecessary to call Beard. He had seen his lordship drive up from the area window. He had never made such small work of a flight of stairs.

Lady Emily was standing with her back to the fire.

Clive kissed her. "You've not been here all night?"

"Not in the flesh," she said, hunting in his cloudless eyes for an answer to the questions that had been torturing her brain for many sleepless hours. "My word," she thought, "the boy looks as though he had seen the fairies."

"Come in, Beard. I want you to help me to pack, if you will. I've not much time."

The little grey woman and the man who considered himself one of the family exchanged looks. It was obvious that they had been discussing the situation to-

gether. He went into the bedroom. There was the sound of the opening of an irascible drawer.

"Going away, Clive?"

"Yes, Aunt Em. Will you excuse me while I write a letter to the hospital?"

"Of course. . . . I suppose I mustn't dare ask Beard to let me help him?"

Beard answered the question through the door that he had left open. "There's no need for your Ladyship to trouble," he said.

"Damn that man!" thought Lady Emily. "If he's in earshot all the time he ruins my chance of getting the truth from my boy." She shut the door, thereby proving herself to possess an immense amount of moral courage.

Clive wrote to the Secretary. "My dear Cator, I am going away. I don't know when I shall be back. Please . . ."

The little grey woman broke in: "It's been cold and wet in town this morning. What was the weather like with you, Clivey?"

"Gorgeous," said Clive, and went on writing . . . "work off the list of names that you will find on my desk, sending the form of letter that I have been using and sign for me. I will let you know my . . ."

Beard came in for the tobacco. He knew that her ladyship realized that he had not arrived at the stage of packing when tobacco and such things were needed, but it was not playing fair to shut the door. He was as much concerned in what he knew must be a crisis in his young master's life as her ladyship was. He gave her an appealing look. Lady Emily nodded. The door would not be closed again.

"Which suit will you wear now, my lord?"

"What? Oh, anything, Beard. The blue one. It doesn't matter."

. . . He wrote again . . . "address so that the cheques

can be sent to me for endorsement, if necessary, and I will keep in touch with you about the work generally."

Lady Emily, whose intuition told her exactly what her boy was going to do, but wanted to be told, threw out another line. "If you're going home, we might go together. I'm going to make for the three-thirty."

Clive only caught one word. "Yes," he said, rising, with a look almost spiritual on his face. "I'm going home. . . . Ready for me, Beard?" He strode into the bedroom.

Lady Emily's heart gave a wild leap of joy. Then he was *not* going to ruin his life and his work and his mother's happiness and her own peace for ever and ever by running away with that girl! He was going home. . . . And then her heart returned to her boots. That amazing light in his eyes. . . . He was using the word "home" in another sense. Oh, God, if only she had forwarded that letter with the others! In cold blood—if cold blood and Clive were possible where that girl was concerned—he might have . . . No. It was inevitable. Sooner or later it had to be.

The little grey woman said nothing more. "We have always ruined our chances and let the world go hang for love," she thought. History has a monotonous knack of repeating itself. There was nothing to be done. The boy was a Hurbert and would ride hell-for-leather to the devil for love.

When Clive came back changed he went to the writing-table and wrote a cheque. "I shall be awfully obliged if you'll cash this for me, Beard. And will you blow up a taxi? I must be off."

Beard put the cheque in his pocket, carried the luggage through into the hall, in two journeys, and went downstairs to open his cash-box.

Lady Emily and Clive stood facing each other. What was the boy going to do and say? . . . He took the little

grey woman in his arms and kissed her and said: "Good-bye. Don't worry about me, and don't let mother worry either. I'm doing what I was born to do. I'll write to mother and to George from Nice."

Before the cab turned the corner Clive leaned far out and waved his hat.

Beard followed Lady Emily back into the sitting-room. She turned and looked at him for a moment. Her lips were trembling, and he went away. Then, alone, she put her elbows on the mantelboard and her face between her hands and broke into a great burst of tears. But while she wept her thoughts ran into wild eddies of congratulation. "Bravo, my boy!" she cried inwardly. "You are doing what I would have done any day if I'd had the chance—you are taking love when it comes to you, and your courage will have its reward. You will never have it again, because it is only given to us to love once in a lifetime. You are right to let nothing stand in your way. Sweep everything aside. Sacrifice everything, let nothing human stop you. Your kingdom is your woman's love."

She stood upright, and with the tears streaming down her lined cheeks, waved her hand.

Clive found Helena waiting for him in the car outside the "Métropole." Effie sat with the chauffeur. There was only just time to catch the boat train. Clive helped the cab-driver transfer his things. Helena watched him with pride. She had always known that he would be strong. When they glided into the traffic and headed for Charing Cross, the pulse of the engine beating impatiently, he bent down and kissed her lips.

"Oh, my God!" he said. "I love you!"

"There's time to turn back," she said, clinging to his hand.

"Turn back!" He sent out a great laugh and kissed her again. What did it matter who saw? This was love.

"He won't make me free, and there will be children."

"Please God there will. I love you!"

"We must make our home in foreign places."

"Our home is with each other. I love you!"

"You are not afraid?"

"Afraid! Why? No man has a claim on me. I'm free, and I'm yours for life and after." And again he kissed her and the splendid normal passion of his love ran into her blood like fire.

"Faster, then," cried Helena. "Tell him to go faster," and she hid her face against his arm. The answer was in her eyes.

At the Lord Warden Hotel—how familiar the place seemed!—Clive went immediately to the desk, turned the large book round, and without hesitation or consideration wrote: "Lord and Lady Clive Hurbert. London."

The impassive, uninterested clerk put down a bundle of letters. "What accommodation do you require, sir?"

"Bedroom with bathroom attached, and a room for a maid. We are crossing in the morning."

"Very good, sir." The clerk's hand wandered for a moment over a large board with keys hanging beneath numbers. He selected two and gave them to the luggage porter.

Clive joined Helena, who was standing in the centre of the hall beneath a chandelier of electric lights. She was looking at the place where she and Clive had sat that other evening. It seemed to her that years had slipped away since then.

When the clerk turned the book round and read the names he looked up quickly. Why should his eyes have filled with pity?

At the door of the open lift Clive drew up. "Sixty-six," he said, looking at Helena with his heart in his eyes. "My lucky number. There's an hour and a half before I need change. Sleep for an hour. You must be awfully tired."

"You won't go out?"

"No. I've nothing to get. I'll wait in the smoking-room."

The clerk looked after him as he swung away. He was whistling softly. It seemed incredible to this man that Clive could whistle. Was it possible that he didn't know?

Instinctively Clive looked into the dining-room. Yes, he had sat at that table near the pillar, and when he had looked up, his very soul feeling as though it were being drawn, she was there, near the window. He wondered if they had changed the flowers. A depressing, old-fashioned, airless room. It would always have a warm corner in his memory.

Well, then, a smoke while Helena rested. Then he would go up. . . . They were never to be apart again. This was the beginning of life. Men, or the husks of men, might laugh or sneer and ask each other, impatiently, if there were nothing in the world worthy of consideration but love, and say: "Good heavens! sex, sex, the eternal question of sex!" Well, it was, is, and always will be eternal. Without love the very word eternal would have to be ruled out of all languages. It was the one immortal act that was permitted to man.

He strode across to the smoking-room. A man with white hair and a black moustache—why should the combination suggest charlatanism of some sort?—was bending over the table, turning over the pages of an illustrated paper. Another, clean-shaven, with gold-rimmed glasses, was lying in one arm-chair with his feet on another, asleep. An evening paper had slipped out of his

hand and was lying on the red carpet. Green on red—good colours. He had worn them at Oxford. An ephemeral club. He had forgotten its name. . . . Oxford! . . . How young and meaningless it all seemed now! This was the beginning of life.

He lit a cigarette and stood at the window. It was dark, and the lights in the street were like small yellow eyes. People moved about—curious, he seemed to be alone on the earth with Helena. . . . He gave a deep breath and a sort of painful joy went quivering through his blood. He turned restlessly and looked at the clock. Almost an hour still to go. After that no more separation. What, after all, was an hour when he had waited so long?

A little song came to his lips. He threw the cigarette away. Every one of his fingers seemed to hold a pulse. He went to the table and opened the *Sketch*. Pictures of people playing golf, being married, coming from "famous funerals," acting in new plays; a shipwreck, a pit disaster—what did all these people and things matter? This was love.

The clerk came in and handed Clive a late edition of a London evening paper. "I think you ought to see this, your Grace," he said, with an odd gravity.

Clive was amused at his title. "Why?" he asked, taking it.

The man endeavoured to frame an apparently difficult sentence, and, failing, bowed and went.

Clive opened it on the second page. His uninterested eye fell on a column continued from the first page. It was headed "Heroic sacrifice." He read: " . . . *had been shopping in the Rue de Rivoli. It is thought that they were then going back to the Grand Hotel on the corner of the Rue de la Paix. It is here that several of the great avenues break into a wide circus, somewhat similar to that of Piccadilly Circus, as all those familiar*

with the beautiful City of Bridges will well remember. They started to cross and got between the lines of traffic. One of the top-heavy motor omnibuses of the Clichy-Odéon Company bore down from the right and a large motor wagon from the left. The young Duchess had left her husband's side, saw her danger, lost her head, and instead of hurrying forward, turned to run back. The omnibus, whose driver had naturally supposed that she was alive to the position, continued on his way. He was within three feet of her when the Duke moved forward quickly, made a long arm, and pushed his young bride out of the line of the 'bus into the arms of an 'agent de police,' and being himself unable to spring out of its way, was run down. Death must mercifully have been instantaneous. Thus the noble record of the Hurberts . . ."

Clive dropped the paper. "Oh, God!" he said.

Helena opened her eyes sleepily as her door was pushed back. The room was dark but for a ladder-like pattern flung upon the floor. The glaring white light of the large lamp of the shop opposite had pierced its way through the old-fashioned blinds. She saw Clive come in like a man who had been hurt. He had something in his hand and his breath came heavily. He shut the door roughly, flung himself on his knees at the side of the bed and held her so passionately that she could hardly breathe.

"I love you! Oh, my God, I love you!" he cried. "I've waited till I'm sick and ill and mad. I'm not going to wait any longer for God or man, death or life. You're mine. You've *got* to be mine. I can't live without you. It's meant that we're to be together. I tell you I love you, I love you! Why should we be stopped at the very door, just as we were going through? Let's go through. We must go through. I couldn't believe in God again if

I thought that He had done this to stop us. It's hideous, incredible, ghastly. Oh, my God, what's the meaning of it?"

In his agony of words there were grief and rage and bewilderment and a wilful refusal to be baffled and held up.

In an instant all the girl's fright and certainty of evil and considerations of self fled before her great love. She tightened her arms round him and held him warmly, possessively. The maternal instinct to protect and comfort that is in the heart of every woman burst into blossom.

In the street below life passed relentlessly on its way.

Here they remained, these two young things, with the strong, white light of actuality making a ladder-like pattern on the dark floor—she, tender and with her soul risen above self-pity because of the eternal wonder of her love; he, hurt and angry, trying to struggle with all his might against the irrevocable hand of fate.

And all the while he stormed against it and said that nothing should stop them, and knowing that they had been stopped, held her so that she couldn't go and covered her face with kisses.

And through her mind a series of questions rushed, jostling. What had happened? Who *could* stop them? Even if Oliver had sent after them, what then? Clive was free.

Presently she said: "What is it?"

And he cried out: "George! It's George! He's dead!"

"Oh, no!"

"Yes. He's dead. It must have happened before we left London. But nothing shall stop us, neither God nor man, death nor life. You're mine and I'm yours. I love you! I love you!"

She freed herself gently and got up. She turned on

the light and picked the paper from the floor and read it, with the whiteness of her arms and neck gleaming, and all the proud young beauty of her body plain through her thin robe.

And while she read Clive pulled himself together—not ashamed of his abandonment of feeling—this was love and life—and watched dumbly, with a sort of wistful hope.

Helena's face was as white as a star when she looked up. She folded the paper with a curious touch of reverence and finality and put it on her dressing-table. Then she sat down by his side on the bed and took his hand.

"We must go back, darling," she cried.

"No! No!"

"Yes. Our time hasn't come."

"We'll make it come."

"We can't. You're the Duke. There are duties waiting for you."

"Duty, duty! I love you!"

"And I love you. That's why we're going back, Clive, darling. We'll try again, won't we, and wait a little longer."

"How long?"

She shook her head. "I can't tell you. All I know is that we love each other. It isn't going to be wasted. It's . . . it's too big, too big, too urgent. . . . Oh, Clive! Oh, my man!"

On the very edge of breaking down—all her dreams, like card-houses, flat and disordered, all the joy of being free with Clive slashed and bleeding, the road back leading to Cardinals and that man—she put her face against his arm and moaned.

Then she got up, standing squarely with her chin high, and helped him to his feet. He stood looking at her—the white young beauty of her body, and the strength and faith and nobility that glowed in her eyes.

"You must go to Paris to-night," she said, "and take George home."

"Yes," he said, when she thought that he would never answer, "and after that, with God's help, I'll try and live up to you. . . . There's something I can't understand in all this. Once before I said I was free to do what I like, that I was the captain of my fate, the master of my soul. . . . What does it mean?"

"I don't know, darling," she said.

He caught and held her. "I love you! I love you! With you or without you I'm yours. Keep yourself for me."

"No one can make me anything but yours," she said.

And as they stood together, having decided once more to separate, and heard life passing relentlessly below, they asked themselves impotently what the meaning of it all was, what they had ever done that fate should dog their heels, and whether life was merely a delusion, a mirage, something that took a fiendish delight in chasing away bewitching phantoms.

"Darling," said Helena, as though both had asked these questions aloud, "if we have faith . . ."

VIII

THE great, big, good-natured, red-headed George lay in his coffin in the picture-gallery of his home, with his feet to the west.

There were no altar candles and no lights in the long lofty room. The silver fingers of the moon lay softly on the big coffin, which was mounted on trestles and draped with the Union Jack. About it, at regular intervals, stood some of the young officers of the Cheshire Yeomanry, leaning, like statues, on reversed arms, with bent heads. They were the men who had ridden with

George's car to the park gates and cheered him as he left with his bride only ten days before. The eyes of many other dead Hurberts looked down from the walls, and it was with pride in their eyes. This man had died well.

It was midnight. The old house was not asleep. Steady lights gleamed in many windows. The little mother sat in her room with her hands in her lap. George, her first baby, had gone and she remained. God's will be done. Edith lay on her bed, face down. The little grey woman, who seemed suddenly to be greyer than before, was in her room, working. Hardly had she cleared her desk of the evidences of George's marriage than it was covered with the practical business of his death. It was difficult to keep her glasses clear as she sat there, planning and managing. The death of the head of the family was as big an affair as the birth and the marriage. She had been in command of all three.

Clive, whose love for the brother he had brought home was second only to his love for Helena, was working too. In his room was the adjutant of the yeomanry. They had chosen the pall-bearers and the firing party and the stations of the guard of honour.

It was one o'clock before he was alone. He went quietly through the rambling passages of the house and stood for a moment outside his mother's door. He knew that she was up still. Should he do and say what was big in his heart, or leave it unsaid and undone? There was all too much room for silence in the grave. He went in, and over to the little soft woman and down on his knees at her side. "I'm left, mammy," he said. "You and I will be very good to each other, won't we?"

Presently, unable to sleep, and filled with a new sense of the gravity of life and the beauty of death, he entered the picture-gallery. Not one man raised his head. And

he went forward and stood at the head of the coffin and laid his hand upon it. "Dear old George," he said inwardly, "my dear old pal and brother, look to me to do my best in your place. Don't worry about your little girl. She's my sister, and I won't forget that. I will try never to do anything in my life that will bring a stain on the name you've put so high, old man. You'll help me, won't you?"

And then he knelt and asked God to take his brother and have mercy on himself.

The next morning, through a lane of people who had so recently waved their hats, George went back to the old parish church. This time he went "feet first," upon the shoulders of his friends. There was no sound but the wonderful air of Mendelssohn's Funeral March, with muffled drums, and the sighing of the old trees which had been very dear to George. Edith, a poor, slight, black figure, stumbled forward on Clive's arm. The mother walked with the little grey woman. Her head beneath her veil was held high. She was proud of her great, big, good-natured son. George's horse came after, with his sword and helmet on the saddle. The tolling bell came and came again. There was one slight figure in black that stood apart from the crowd. Her eyes followed Clive, and her heart was in them.

Led by the vicar and the chanting choir the little procession, humbler than the breaker of stones with gnarled and trembling hands, who had known George's father and grandfather, passed slowly into the Hurbert vault. Into its allotted place, among his people, George's coffin went.

Clive, the wife, the little mother and Lady Emily stood there listening wistfully, like trusting children, to the sweet words of hope and homage. Finally, each one

stood over the open grave and said a last word. Edith had a flower. She dropped it, and a piercing cry made the people in the churchyard quiver with pity.

Clive bent down quickly and picked her up.

PART IV

I

CLIVE left the House of Lords at five o'clock. His blood was still tingling. He had been on his feet that afternoon for the first time. He felt impelled to speak on a question that affected the yeomanry which had been raised by the first reading of a bill dealing with the problem of the army and auxiliary forces.

As he crossed the courtyard, acknowledging the salute of a police-inspector, the afternoon sun of a God-sent June day fell warmly on his face. A bevy of eager pigeons ran out of his way, and the photographer of an enterprising morning illustrated paper, which had heard that he had made his maiden speech as the Duke of Cheshire, snapped him as he passed out.

Whitehall was heavily alive. Clerks were coming out of the stucco Government offices like bees from a row of hives. Two lines of motor omnibuses went whirling along, one towards Westminster Bridge and the other to Charing Cross and the Haymarket. The London season, then in full swing, had filled the old town with visitors, and the American flag played against the blue sky from many buildings.

Clive turned off into Birdcage Walk to cross the Green Park. He was on his way to get some tea and write letters at Arthur's, in St. James's Street. His daily letter to Helena, who was staying with the Harlings in the Isle of Wight, would have the outlines of what he had just said and how it was received. Lord Roberts had been

generous enough to say a few complimentary words—compensation indeed for his natural nervousness.

He crossed the bridge over the lake in the park and stood for a moment watching the ducks being fed by some children. The Royal Standard was flying over Buckingham Palace, making a pleasant touch of colour above that drab building. The King was in London.

As he moved on a hand was laid on his shoulder and a charmingly clear and mellow voice turned him about eagerly. "By Jove! this is a good sight," he said, and took the thin, long, delicate hand.

"I saw you coming, and waited," said Edmund Essendine. "You grow more like your father every time I see you, dear lad. May I walk with you?"

"Well, rather, sir," said Clive. "Come and have some tea at the club and tell me all your news."

"I've no news to tell. I'm past the age, but I'm as keen as mustard to hear all yours. Just before I left the Marlborough it came through on the tape that you'd made a splendid impression in the Lords. So *very* glad, Clive, my dear. Fine reading in the morning for the little mother and Lady Em, eh?"

Clive laughed, but his eyes danced a little, and there was a touch more colour in his face. His father's old friend had the gift for saying the right thing rightly—and meaning it. He hadn't seen him since he had stayed in London with George, very nearly a year ago, when he was finishing a short holiday before returning to Berlin and his ambassadorial duties. He ran his eyes over the thin, easy, graceful, thoroughbred man, who wore his white tall hat at an unconscious angle and his inevitable snowy spats as though he had been born in them. He had the delightful knack of always looking and being just the same. He seemed to make Time, which had dealt uncommon kindly with him, stand still—in itself a delicate compliment to everyone who knew him.

The Miracle of Love

Sir Edmund Essendine, British Ambassador to the Court of Emperor William, returned the affectionate inspection, and found young Clive looking older and a little graver, and more of a man. Grief has its time, and, like a tree, has tears for its fruit. Clive had come through with squared shoulders. God had given him the earth for his life. He was evidently going to try to make it the better for his passage. That was good.

"Well," he said, as he swung along with his arm through Clive's, "I'm in the old town again for a short holiday, and I confess that each time I come back—remember that I've been coming back now from other great cities for twenty-seven years—I find it more and more attractive. There's a curious charm about London that one doesn't find in Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg, New York, or even Paris, though to my mind Paris comes nearest. Is it the kind maternal face, do you suppose, and the same old eyes that seem to welcome all wandering Englishmen? I don't think so, because foreigners are caught by the unexplainable something that they find nowhere else. Look there, for instance. 'Pon my soul, you can't find any such skyline as that of Piccadilly through the trees with the afternoon sun gilding the roofs and chimneys. And find an air, if you can, more exhilarating than that sung by the traffic. Of course, New York—oh, by the way, I want you to meet some delightful American friends of mine, Madison Kirby and his wife, and their daughter, Cornelia, commonly called Nina. Not, my dear fellow, that it makes a fig what she's called. A rose by any other name, eh? And that naïve, upstanding, fearless, clean-eyed young thing is quite a rose, I give you my word."

"Thanks," said Clive. "Any time you like."

A new thought had immediately struck Essendine. The problem of marrying money faced Clive as it had faced George. These Kirbys had made big money.

They would like to see their only girl married to an Englishman who counted. They had that irresistible penchant for titles and history that goes with all democratic nations. It would be natural enough for Nina to fall in love with Clive, and Clive would have to be very difficult to please if he did not find that girl attractive. Matchmake? Why not? He had an affection for both families, and how pleasant to be the means of diverting some of Kirby's superfluous thousands to the upkeep of the old house and name. Good! It would give him something to do.

But he was diplomatically careful to show no keenness about the introduction, or to make any further mention of the horrid, necessary word "money." "Well, then," he said, "lunch with me at the 'Ritz' to-morrow, and I'll try to get them to join us. They're at the 'Coburg.' You'll find Kirby a splendid fellow, quite the best type of self-made American, a rather shy, modest, good-natured man, who talks mostly of golf and fishing. You suspect him at first of being nothing but a good sportsman until, little by little, you discover—though not through anything he says—that he is one of the most brilliant, daring and expert engineers of the age, I suppose, whose work stands up, in many parts of his great country, for posterity to use and wonder at. Oh, a fine fellow, in every way! And his wife—a nice, shrewd, simple, unaffected woman, with white hair and splendid teeth, and a way of using the letter *r* that puts all Scotland to bed—is as much in love with 'Maddy,' as she calls him, as she was when he went courting on the stoop of her father's little New England house of wood with a tin roof before the days of cuspidors."

They went through the courtyard of St. James's Palace, mellow and warm under the golden light.

"I'm going down to Sandwich on Friday for three days' golf," said Essendine. "Will you come?"

"I should love it," said Clive, "but I can't possibly get away."

"I forgot. They tell me you're a pretty hard worker now."

"I'm doing what I can," said Clive, with a touch of impatience. "We've started building the new wing at the hospital that I'm trying to put on its legs, and I'm sending away weekly detachments of street boys to the sea for holidays under canvas. Poor little devils! The shock of the first wonder of the sea nearly kills some of the imaginative ones. I don't have much time for golf these days, one way and another."

They turned into the club, through whose narrow doorway the bloods and bucks with powdered wigs and flowered coats were wont to pass, their swords touching the stonework as they went. Clive ordered tea in the morning-room. Essendine sat down, crossed his long legs, and looked about him reminiscently.

"I came up for Arthur's once," he said. "But what in the name of common sense is the use of five clubs to a man who can only use them for about six weeks during the year? I know this old room well, though. I used to come here with your father."

Clive instinctively looked round as though searching for some evidence of the man whom George and he had loved and regarded as time-proof, and with whom, with the lucky confidence of boyhood, he had never connected death and disappearance.

"This was George's pet club, too," he said. His voice suddenly broke. "Think of it. Just think of it. . . . When I got to Paris that morning and saw him lying on his bed, he looked so utterly peaceful and contented that I almost called him to wake up and come out. I had done it hundreds of times."

Essendine nodded and gave a little sigh. "I read of the accident in the foreign cables of a German paper.

It hurt very badly, and afterwards I had a little letter from Lady Em. She told me about his wife. Poor girl! She came very early in life against its tragedies, didn't she? . . . If she had had a son." . . .

"I wish to God she had," said Clive. "I would gladly have remained a nonentity. I'm forcing myself to play the game, but all this is no use to me. It goes against the grain. I'm not cut out to be a duke. I don't know whether I'm afflicted with an abnormal quantity of self-consciousness or a sort of diseased humour, or what it is. I only know that half my time I'm standing outside my skin, in a sort of way, and watching myself playing at being useful by cadging money on the strength of my name from people who hate giving. It's infernally humiliating to know that the new wing of the little cripples' hospital would never have been started if I had not lent myself out to rich vulgarians for the evening and pandered to snobbishness. Any day of the week I'd rather be one of the men I see hurrying away from their offices to get home to wives and children and little squares of garden. There's something real and simple about their lives, sordid as they may be. And even they, with their small salaries, aren't poorer, relatively speaking, than I am . . . and when I go home and catch every eye on all the walls following me about in dumb appeal to marry and continue the race, I want to get on a car and drive through a high wind into a new world where a man can lead his own life."

Sir Edmund, whose sympathy and understanding had been appealed to at first, now eyed him with surprise. "But," he said, "don't you want to marry and settle down, my dear Clive?"

"I don't want anything else—anything."

The answer came with a ring of such deep feeling and a longing so poignant that the studiously unemotional

man who heard it was aware of having placed his finger on the bell of a secret door in Clive's heart.

A waiter brought in tea.

When Essendine went out into St. James's Street and up into Piccadilly, he told himself that behind that young man's burning eyes there was a very furnace of love for some woman who was out of his reach. . . . Poor, dear lad! He too, then, like every other plain and gilded man in the world, was making the old discovery, so astounding to each one in his turn, that life is not a thing to mould and shape like putty, but a substance as hard as rock through which he has to force his way, sweating and sore.

II

HELENA was with the Harlings in the Isle of Wight. A telegram from her mother had called her from Cardinals. Dear old Evelyn was ill for the first time in his Micawberish life. He had been out fishing in the launch of one of his friends' yacht, and being determined, like a schoolboy playing truant, to seize every moment of the day, sat solidly in the pouring rain from six o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon. The result was an attack of pneumonia. Like most men who have had the good fortune to escape illness until ripe middle-age, Harling took to his bed angrily and fearfully. And as he lay tossing and fever-ridden with his lungs ablaze, many strange creatures, all with his own face, stood round him and seemed to fling long, sharp arrows, the tips of which were poisoned with the bitter truth. There were dreadful hours during which he shook with the fear of death, and it was while under the influence of the first of these that he cried out for his little girl.

Helena stayed in the charming but untidy little house

with mixed feelings. It would never have sheltered her father and mother but for the perverted and sensual fancy for herself that had stirred Harwich into buying her. Every piece of furniture in every room seemed to wear the black man's sneering smile. The place was more painful to her and more degrading than Cardinals itself. Her sympathy for her father remained unimpaired and was shown, to his pathetic and childish joy, by her unremitting care of him; but the underlying and unshakable feeling that even with her father and mother she was still under the cynical influence and keepership of her owner accompanied all her hours.

Able doctoring and careful nursing pulled dear old Evelyn out of the grasp of the cold hands that awoke all the contrition of which this peculiarly selfish and self-centred man was capable. But convalescence left him in an odd frame of mind. He found a new sort of pleasure, as selfish as all his others, and even more egotistical, in holding Helena's hand and telling her the carefully Bowdlerized story of his minor sins.

With the characteristic ability to look at everything through the wrong end of the telescope, except the particular things that affected himself, when, of course, he used a magnifying glass, Harling persisted in seeing Harwich as one of the most excellent, kindly and desirable men in the world. He talked about dear Oliver by the hour together, and spoke about Cardinals and Helena's life there with carefully-chosen words that slopped over with sentimentality. Even poor, slipshod Mrs. Harling, who had become inured to Evelyn's genius for misrepresentation, squirmed and eyed Helena furtively at these appalling moments. They were especially unbearable to her because of a curious letter that had been written to them both by Harwich on the day that Clive took Helena from Cardinals, congratulating them upon the possession of a daughter who had inherited to such a

marked degree the Harling qualities of being able to slip through the clauses of an undertaking.

It was curious to watch the way in which these two, both eaten up with curiosity, threw out lines to Helena in an endeavour to catch the meaning of the letter that remained a constant puzzle to them. They were afraid to ask direct questions for fear that they might hear an unpalatable truth which would make them realize, more clearly than they did, the horror and the cruelty of the marriage for which Harling was to blame. But not one word did they succeed in getting from Helena. All the incidents connected with her so-called marriage had been locked up by her in a kind of safe of which only she possessed the key. Into this iron thing she had placed the episode, hardest of all to forget, which had to do with her return from Dover. This, although she struggled to fling it out of her memory, came back to her in her dreams night after night. And then, as clearly as in a series of moving pictures, she saw over and over again each particular incident of that dreadful night, hearing, at the same time, the sardonic laughter that went with them. She saw herself leave Dover by the seven o'clock train—Clive, with a dead white face, standing alone on the platform. She saw herself crumple, when the train went out, and sit broken and crushed, beyond the relief of tears; arrive at Victoria Station to hurry, as though eager to go home, to another platform to catch the train to Lewes—there, late at night, to choke back her pride and telephone to Cardinals for a car. In the great, lofty hall, with its stained-glass, uncurtained windows, made almost colourless by the moon's showy white light, she saw the shiny head and graceful shoulders of her husband, who welcomed her with words that fell upon her like the thongs of a cat-o'-nine-tails, and with a soft, sneering laugh that made her blood turn cold. During the months that followed there were many short con-

versations that nothing could ever wipe off her memory. They were mostly conducted in the palm-court, to the incessant splashing of water and the small, harsh cries of the tropical birds.

"Ah," he used to say, looking up from the paper with a glitter in his yellow eyes. "I see that the Leslie-Carrs have got another boy. When are *you* going to present me with a son and heir?" Or, wheeling himself round suddenly from behind a royal palm, he would look at the title of the book she was reading, and say: "Good, isn't it? A story of stolen joy and an unfaithful lover?" And on Christmas Day, having insisted on sitting at the table in the great, silent dining-hall, he raised a glass of water and drank a toast "to the child, whether boy or girl. If boy, suppose we pay a compliment to both sides and call him Clive Oliver?"

He knew, of course, why Clive had turned back, but he persisted in giving Helena the most elaborate pity, always classing her with the women whose lovers had deserted them. This, too, when he quickly discovered that Clive continued to write to her daily. Indeed, with the most subtle ingenuity and cunning resourcefulness, and as if it were the only pleasure of his dreadful life, he managed to refer in some way or other every day, sometimes over and over again in different words, to the elopement and the return. He detested the beautiful girl who gradually assumed a sort of chain-mail to resist his pointed dagger, and never got over his resentment and rage at having been unable to prevent her from going away with the man who was obviously her mate. And although he still found pleasure in eyeing her beauty, he delighted fiendishly in putting her through daily torture—an abnormal creature!

In the months that followed his disease seemed to remain in abeyance, like a tide before it turns. He got no better—that was impossible—but he got no worse; and

during the monotonous passing of week after week Helena built up a little world of her own, which, surrounded by high walls, contained only Clive and herself. And here, mentally, she passed all her time with hope and faith blossoming in her garden. Without this sheltered and beautiful brain-space in which to wander she would have lost her reason.

Her father and mother were the last people to whom she could either confide or complain—her father because she believed that it would hurt his soul to realize into what a life he had deliberately placed her to save himself, and her mother because it was not difficult for her now to see all that she had been through in her adventurous life. And so she scrupulously avoided the bait thrown out to her and held her peace. She had Clive's letters and his love, and his spirit walked with her. Over her walls and beyond the day she dared not peer, because she knew that Clive was faced with the necessity of continuing his race.

III

CLIVE was on his way to the Ritz Hotel to lunch with Sir Edmund Essendine and meet the Kirbys, when, passing the Albany, the exhilarating note of a coach-horn brought him suddenly out of a maze of tangled thoughts, in which Helena, marriage for money, and his impotent efforts to discover work that would enable him to earn enough to make such a marriage unnecessary were all mixed up together. He turned his head. But his eyes were not caught by the coach that went with a pleasant touch of conceit through the courteous traffic, but by a little grey figure, walking quickly on the other side of the street. He waited his chance and crossed, and following with long strides, ran his arm through

that of the woman who ought to have been the head of the family.

"What mischief are *you* up to?" he asked.

Lady Emily gave a nervous jump, and her hand went up to the breast-pocket of her mannish coat. "Mischief? God bless the boy, what makes you think I'm up to any mischief?"

"Well, when you come to London once in a blue moon you always let me know, don't you?"

"I shouldn't have gone back without looking you up, old man, you may be sure of that. I've run up to see my . . . my tailor. Where are you off to now? Will you give me a sandwich somewhere, or are you ashamed to be seen with a woman who wears a man's straw hat and square-toed shoes?"

Clive laughed and squeezed her arm. "You shut up," he said. "I needed the tonic that the sight of you always gives me."

"Thankee, darling."

"And I wish to goodness I could give you lunch. I've got one or two things heavy on my chest that I'd like most awfully to talk to you about. But Essendine's feeding me at the 'Ritz,' and I'm to meet some American friends of his. I forget the name."

A sudden light came into the little grey woman's eyes. "Is Edmund in London? I think he might have sent me a line or two and asked himself down to Sumptermead. There are no attractions there, though, for so popular a man."

"Come along and tell him so and lunch with us. Why not?"

"I'll come along and have a few words with him, but I won't lunch, thanks, dear. As a matter of fact, I've only just got time to look in at my tailor's before making a bee-line for the station. I'm expecting a new litter to-

night or early to-morrow, and I must be there or thereabouts."

"Righto!" said Clive. "You and your dogs. However, I shall see you on Friday. I'm going down for the week-end. I gather from mother's letter this morning that she's not very fit. I'm anxious about her."

"She's sleeping badly and has headaches in consequence. Come and drive them away. What a barrack-like place the 'Ritz' is! If they must put up new buildings in this old town, why in the name of all that's wonderful can't they consult an architect with a feeling for good lines?"

They came on Essendine in the foyer in his gleaming spats.

The light came again in the little grey woman's eyes, as she saw him. "Um!" she said, holding out her hand. "And you call yourself a friend!"

"My dear Em," he said, "how delightful! You're lunching, of course. Do you know, I had made up my mind to send you a telegram this afternoon to ask if I might run down to the old place for two or three days."

Lady Emily gave a chuckle. "You always did have a mighty sly way of anticipating reproaches, Edmund. It grows more and more finished. There are only two old women there now to give you welcome."

"Thanks, dear friend. I'm a bit of an old woman myself, y'know. Clive, you're as punctual as the income-tax papers. The Kirbys can come. That's excellent."

"Aunt Emily can't join us," said Clive. "She is wrapped up in the enlargement of the canine population and is on her way home."

"You may laugh, you two, but if I hadn't got my heart in a hobby, I might either be a drug fiend or a suffragist —and I don't know which is the worse."

"I do," said Essendine dryly. "Well, how would this week-end suit you to have me?"

"Topping!" said Clive. "We'll go down together."

"That will be perfectly delightful. Ah, here are our Americans."

And with a wink at Clive and a wave of the hand to Sir Edmund, the little grey woman turned and fled.

It was not a tailor's to which she made her way, but to the St. James's Street branch of her bank. Here she filled up a slip for two thousand pounds, attached a cheque for that amount to it and handed them both to the cashier. Then with a profound sigh in which there was as much regret as satisfaction, she went back into the street, hailed a prowling taxi-cab and told him to drive to her station. There was no time to get lunch, so she bought three sandwiches at the restaurant and took them with her to the train.

Once in the empty carriage she addressed herself aloud: "Well, Em, my dear, you've done it at last. The Lord knows how many times you've threatened it, but never before has my darling boy, Clive, needed to be saved as much as possible from the carking worry of money shortness. And, after all, when you come to plain home-truth, what in the name of all that's paradoxical do you need diamond trinkets for—a manny woman, a doggy old person with short grey hair, who's never going to be blessed with a girl to whom these things can be passed on? Eh? With these two thousand little, jingling, damnable, useful pounds one portion of the old house can be made sound, at any rate, God be thanked, and what better thing can a superfluous old body do than that? What, of course, Clive will say when he finds out . . ."

She gave a little gesture and a little grimace, took out her glasses, put them on to her finely-chiselled nose and opened her paper with an air of determined concentration. But not one word of it could she read.

"How far has Clive gone with that girl?" she asked

herself. "Is he trying to wait until Harwich dies? And even if that unfortunate wretch has the luck to slip away within two or three years, what then? She's Harling's daughter. No money there. And if Harwich leaves her anything, which is doubtful—he knows about Clive, all right—Clive certainly wouldn't be able to touch a farthing of *that* money! . . . Money, money. Oh, my God! How infinitely too much it costs! It's a bottomless sea in which honour and truth are either drowned or washed up without a conscience. Pity the poor, O Lord, and pity the rich who are poorer still!"

IV

IT was dear old Evelyn's first day downstairs. With his hand on Helena's shoulder he had come feebly down, having chosen what he considered to be an appropriate convalescent suit with infinite care. He had made so sound a recovery for a man who had habitually tippled that his doctor was completely astonished. "These thoroughbreds take a lot of killing," he told his wife.

Anyone who knew Harling well—perhaps too well—would have been quietly amused at the man's admirable display of acting that sunny morning. With a rather pathetic desire to keep the sympathy and tender care of his wife and daughter as long as possible, he rounded his shoulders and let his knees go under him, panted heavily as he moved step by step across the floor of the sitting-room to the window, and sat, finally, with nodding head, flaccid hands and closed eyes. He certainly managed to look the very shadow of his former well-preserved, dandified, alert self. He demanded, too, the constant presence of both wife and daughter. He required them, pettishly, to sit close to him, so that in case he should feel a little faint, he could take their hands. If either ventured to

move, he said: "Where are you going, dear? Don't leave me." Or if, filled with relief to see him downstairs once more, they laughed at some small joke, he put his hand on his chest and said weakly: "I don't want to be a wet blanket, but try to remember that I am not out of the wood yet, won't you?"

The broad comedy of this attempt to cling to invalidism in order to demand attention came in when, left alone while the others went to luncheon, he shot a sly look round to see that he was not observed, and then, making a long arm, directed the large telescope that stood on an elaborate stand in the window to the smoking-room window of the club, and then to the jetty where, he told himself, there might be "something dashed alluring in the way of fluff."

Not even the shadowy presence of the angel of death could cure this man of his deep-rooted, inherent hypocrisy. He was now, an elderly man, escaped from the grave, as much a cheat and a humbug as ever, and as fundamentally false to himself as to everybody else. The very sight of his naked conscience, clear for once of all the fungi of self-misrepresentation, left him just as much able to twist hard facts to his own liking as when he first entered the mess-room of his regiment, charming, persuasive, modest and peculiarly attractive. His whole life had been built on a sham. There was not one grain of honesty or unselfishness in his whole composition. If he had been born in the middle-class he must have served his time in gaol, and now be selling papers on the edge of the entrance to the Underground Railway in a dirty collar, clothes in which he slept on park seats, and boots which were kept together with an ingenuity deserving of better things. And yet, as though once more to prove the irony of life, which dearly loves a paradox, here he was, adored and waited on by a wife whose money he had gambled away and to whom he had never been faith-

ful, and a daughter whom he had sold to a carnal fiend in exchange for hard cash. Providence is generally very kind to drunkards. It is, however, somewhat difficult to understand why it so often extends such complete sympathy to parasites and scoundrels. As Minnie Luxminster said in her blunt way to her affectionate Arthur, as that tubby little gentleman was attempting one night to take off his boots: "It don't give honesty much encouragement to see flagrant dishonesty stewing in the warm sun on the white deck of a hundred-thousand-pound yacht of its own, does it, Cockie?"

By a very pleasant coincidence it was Lady Luxminster's loud, resonant, good-natured voice that sounded suddenly in the Harlings' hall that afternoon, and her glaring peroxide head that peered round the corner of the sitting-room. She came upon Harling and his womenkind—a charming picture of domestic felicity. Arthur trotted in at her heels, or rather in her wake. She made as much disturbance whenever she moved as a heavy tug-boat.

"Well," she said, "you're a bit of a wonder, Evelyn, aren't you? Pneumonia! If it had been a dose of delirium tremens, now, I shouldn't have been surprised, would you, Arthur?"

"My *dear* Min, go easy, go easy."

Dear old Evelyn perked up. The sight of these two, with whom he had put in so many good times at their expense, was exciting. "Let her have her head, Arthur," he cried out, laughing in his old gay way. "Otherwise she'll kick over the traces. My dear Minnie, my dear Arthur, where do you two spring from?"

Lady Luxminster gave Mrs. Harling a resounding kiss. "How are you, dearie? We've been cruising on Dick Minety's yacht. Toppin' time! And how's my darlin' girl? More lovely than ever, bless me if she isn't." She held Helena's tawny head to her too ample bosom. "Came

to nurse the king of kidders, eh? Well, you've pulled him out of the soup between you, that's plain. Evelyn, you look younger and handsomer than ever, my boy, and I dare say your illness has given you a new lease of life. Time to catch up with yourself a bit when you're lyin' on your back with nothin' to do but watch the giddy flies, isn't there? My word! I shall be glad to sit down. I'm pulled in so tight I can hardly breathe, and my shoes are exactly half a size too small. What a life!"

"We heard you'd been ill," said Arthur, "so, of course, we came along."

"Just like you, my dear Arthur." Harling laid a hand on his knee. He belonged to the type that lays on hands. "I've had a very bad time, very bad indeed. My doctor said that he hadn't seen a worse go of pneumonia for fifteen years. I always did break records, didn't I?"

Mrs. Harling and Helena smiled proudly at him. He looked particularly nice as he sat there, his jaw-line fined down by his illness. He had been just a shade on the fat side before.

"And where do you go next, Minnie?" asked Mrs. Harling, "round the English coast or back to France?"

Lady Luxminster got up and did up five hooks for Mrs. Harling. She loved everything to be ship-shape. "We're off to London for three weeks," she said. "Eva Minety has lent us her house and servants in Curzon Street, and Arthur and I, who haven't been on the ratchet for two years, jumped at the offer. We've got a nice little bit of the ready stowed away in a stockin', and we're goin' to blow it at the rate of ten thousand a year for three weeks, and then go back and eat spring onions, bathe and play bridge at St. Malo in the old sweet way."

Dear old Evelyn's eyes sparkled. "Jove!" he said. "I'd give a good deal to join you. I haven't smelt London or stuck my feet under the table at the 'Savoy' for nearly twelve months."

"Never mind, dear," said Mrs. Harling. "This place suits you very well now."

"Yes," said Minnie. "It 'ud be bad policy to put you among your old haunts again now, Evelyn. You're on a very comfortable shelf here, old man, well out of mischief —though I see you keep your telescope trailed on to the jetty. But I tell you what I *do* think would be a good scheme. I'll take Helena up with us and give her a round of theatres. What? Like to come, honey? Of course you would. Buck you up a bit, wouldn't it, and send you back to the rajah and his palace with something else to think about. What do you say?"

Clive was in London—Clive, whom she hadn't seen since last October. "I'd love it," she said. "I'd simply love it! The only thing is, father . . ."

"Oh, he's all right, is father. He'll be out and about again in a day or two, throwin' sheeps' eyes at pretty women, as usual. You come, darling. It 'ud make our holiday twice as enjoyable, and if I must add one more word of the truth, I'd dearly love to keep you out of that black man's reach, if it's only for three weeks. Have your things packed by to-morrow mornin' and we'll pick you up on our way to town. Ah, here's tea. It'll save my life. You may not think it, but I've been standing a goodish bit since we landed, and to a woman of my weight to stand is to make enemies of one's feet. You see, we hadn't the faintest idea where you lived, neither of us ever rememberin' an address, and so we had to find out. Arthur was all for goin' to the club. Well, it was some way off. I knew one better than that. I went along the jetty till I saw a pretty woman sitting on one of the sailin' boats to hire—the man's wife or sister, and I sang out: 'Can you please tell me where Captain Evelyn Harling lives?' We got it all right. Oh, you naughty old thing!" She shook her fist at dear old Evelyn, who

had almost forgotten that he was an invalid, and was laughing loudly and preening himself.

And on and on that good woman went, saying whatever flashed across her mind without the smallest consideration for her listeners' susceptibilities, and she was watched with the utmost affection and some concern by the little husband whom she had pulled out of certain ruin by the scruff of his neck. Unknown to anyone in the room, however, she was playing a little game of her own that might revolutionize the lives of Clive and Helena.

V

WITH his heart thumping and the blood whirling through his veins, Clive stood on the steps of the Minetys' house in Curzon Street at four o'clock of the day following Essendine's luncheon-party at the "Ritz." Helena's last letter had told him of her brief holiday in London with the Luxminsters, and given him the hour. Lady Luxminster would be out with Arthur. A footman opened the door.

"Is the Duchess of Harwich at home?"

"Yes, sir. Kindly step in."

Clive could hardly be said to step in, for he seemed to be walking on air. He had not had one glimpse of Helena since that fatal night, when he had watched her train leave Dover platform. He followed the man up a flight of white stairs with a sea-green carpet, and was shown into a large drawing-room with white pillars. There stood Helena, like a young moon, all slight and white and sweet. Without noticing the full-blown woman with golden hair and penciled eyebrows who looked up sharply as his name was announced, he went forward and caught the girl in his arms.

"Oh, my God!" he said, and kissed her.

"Clive, my man!"

"All these months, without you, groping through life."

"And all the months ahead of us and only hope to live on." The depth of feeling and impatience in her voice showed that even those walls that she had built round her little world were not high enough to prevent her from climbing over them sometimes.

Clive became aware, to his astonishment, that some large object was trying to slip quietly out of the room. He drew back quickly as he recognized a woman, and said: "I beg your pardon," with a touch of antagonism.

The faces of the two as they stood looking at each other were more than Helena could bear. She burst out laughing. "Lady Luxminster," she said, "this is Clive—I mean the Duke of Cheshire."

Thrilling under the romance in which she found herself, and with a quickened pulse at the tremendous love that had made Clive's voice thick, she held out a very sympathetic, over be-ringed hand. She liked this man, so tall and strong and direct, who seemed to own the earth and possess Helena. "I am glad you've come," she said. "Go on. Don't mind me. I like it."

She was really just a little ashamed of herself for having allowed an overwhelming curiosity to make her miss her engagement. She told herself that she must see Clive or go off with a bang. It was only by a superhuman effort of will that she had prevented herself from telling Helena that she had talked Mrs. Minety into lending her the house for the sole purpose of bringing Clive into her life again. She had gone cruising with the Minetys, with whom she had nothing in common—hating the bare idea of a small state-room and the perpetual movement of water—simply in order that she might carry out a deeply-considered scheme.

The world is never so small as when it is filled with human beings, and not even the cable can spread news

so quickly as the human tongue. It happened that a month ago she engaged an English maid, being tired of her attempt to make her brown-faced Breton girl understand her pigeon French. Now the girl whose passage she paid over from Southampton came from Lewes, and was Effie's confidential friend as well as cousin. To this girl, under the usual solemn oath that goes with the telling of a profound secret, Effie had whispered the story of the elopement and its sudden break-up. Finding herself in a foreign country for the first time, and being unaware that her new mistress knew the Duchess of Harwich, this little Sussex girl had told Lady Luxminster the whole story, with one or two little additions of her own, while doing the peroxide hair for bed.

Minnie Luxminster was a good and faithful woman, possessed of several curiously old-fashioned principles. But she was devoted to Helena and detested the very name of Harwich, and held, in her grampus-like way, that all laws fell like a house of cards before love, and that all the ten commandments could be broken without punishment by those few men and women whose love stood out in the world like a great blazing beacon.

Clive took her hand in the spirit in which it was given, said: "You're very kind," and though looking utterly calm and self-possessed, felt excessively foolish.

"I was goin' to tear myself away and go downstairs to the mornin'-room of this white-and-green doll's-house, and put one of Heller's disturbing 'Sleepless Nights' on the pianola; but it occurs to me that I can do better for you both if I stay and we all three have a quiet pow-wow and see what can be arranged. At any rate, we can try, can't we? And I don't see that any harm can be done. So sit down, my dears, and hold hands, and let's concentrate like three professors examining a new type of bug. Not that it is new, for God knows love is the oldest and best thing in the world, isn't it?"

Clive and Helena exchanged glances in which there was some irritation, some amusement, and a tacit agreement that perhaps this shrewd, good-natured woman, whose sentiment had not dribbled into mere sentimentality, could show them a way out of their maze.

All three sat down and Clive held Helena's hand.

"Now let me be perfectly frank with you two dear people," said Minnie Luxminster, leaning eagerly towards them. "I'm not goin' to tell you how I know, but I *do* know that you were goin' to take the law into your own hands last year and got as far as Dover. For your sakes I wish you'd been able to cross the Channel and make as near an approach to a little heaven for yourselves somewhere as we are permitted to on this earth."

"So do I," said Clive, "for every reason." One of them was that George would then have been alive.

"But it wasn't to be—then. Very well, now let's see how things stand now, and what we can do to twist them into a shape that suits you best. I don't have to ask you if you love my dear girl. It's as plain as the nose on my face. The room shakes with it. And I know that honey loves you, otherwise she would never have been able to go on living sanely with the black man. That goes without saying. Now, dear boy—excuse my calling you dear boy like that—what's your position? Be candid with me. I'm your friend because I love this dear girl, and what you say will go no further than this room."

Clive needed this talk as a lonely sensitive man needs companionship on a long, hard road. For months he had argued with himself until his brain was like a whirlpool. He said: "I have no position. As a duke, I'm more or less a farcical figure. I haven't sufficient money to run enough servants at Sumptermead to keep the place clean. My income, and it's precious little, is drawn from rents, and it dwindles every year because the property is

taxed out of existence. The house is horribly in need of repairs, inside and out, and I can't find anything to do that will bring in money. All I'm doing is to draw unwilling money for charity out of rich people on the strength of my name. I'm simply turning snobbishness into account for my hospital and the poor little devils who haunt the streets. If I had enough money I would wait for Helena till . . . till . . ."

"The cows come home—of course you would. Having none, your people are urging you to marry money, as your brother had to, and so many other young men who stand in similar shoes. Is that it?"

"Yes," said Clive. "Exactly."

"But how about all the money old Cranston settled on your poor brother? Hasn't that gone into the family pot?"

Clive shook his head. "It was settled on George for his lifetime and goes to his children."

"Ah, bad luck and bad bargain! If I'd been George I'd have had it settled on the estate. And so, here you are, markin' time, aching for Helena, who's tied to that detestable creature at Cardinals, and doing your job as best you can, with clean hands and clean conscience. You look it, through and through. There's no coal on your place, by any chance?"

"Not a nob," said Clive.

"Nor a drop of oil?"

Clive shook his head. "An old house, full of valuable things that can't be sold, and a park full of old trees. That's all."

"Um!" said Lady Luxminster. "The country's shot about ten thousand miles beyond you dukes, hasn't it? We're no longer a monarchy surrounded by aristocracy and sustained by patriots. We're simply a democracy that tolerates a monarch. Well, it's pretty obvious then, unless you find Tom Tiddler, and wheedle him into givin'

you the run of his ground, or can smile a philanthropist who isn't wedded to the building of unnecessary libraries in places that would give their ears not to have them out of a large lump sum, you must put yourself on the matrimonial market to the highest bidder—because you can't ask the Government to take over your house as a museum —it isn't yours, and you can't sell it, because you only hold it in trust for your oldest son."

"That's the position," said Clive.

"And even if you wait until the devil takes Harwich you can't marry Helena, because all his money will go to the person who succeeds him."

Clive put Helena's hand to his lips, and there was a moment's silence in the rather pretentious room.

"Well," said Minnie, looking from one wistful face to the other, "there are two ways stretchin' out in front of you young people. One leads to what those crack-jaw French people call a *cul-de-sac,* and the other to . . ."

"Where?" said Helena eagerly, speaking for the first time in that strange interview.

"Heaven, honey."

"Well?" asked Clive.

"Along the first one you can both go, alone, with some miles of cold space dividing you. True, you will both be able to wear the martyr's wreath and admire yourselves for havin' resisted temptation, and played the game, and done all the other things that arm-chair moralists would have you do. Result—discontent and eventually two warped and maimed lives and the loss of children born well to posterity. Along the other you go together, but like so many other poor devils of human beings have had to do—surreptitiously. You will snatch at joy, take what you will never, never find apart, or again, and with the utmost circumspection, and obeying all the damn-fool laws of convention, join the ranks of the great lovers. There you have it, in a nutshell. And, in heaven's name,

what harm will you do? You will set a bad example to bad people and a good example to good ones. I hear people say Harwich. Well, what about him? How can he count in the scheme of things—a debauchee, with two feet in the grave? A man for whom the lethal chamber is the right and appropriate place. Don't, in any case, stop one single minute to consider Harwich. 'Gather ye rose-buds while ye may'—I don't know the rest, but it's good and true, and what I say is this: If you can't adapt yourselves to life, adapt life to yourselves. You only have it once. Take it and make it while it's yours. You'll be doing no one any harm and yourselves great good."

Clive got up and walked about the room. This woman summed up the position as he had summed it up, a thousand times. In the middle of the night, on long lonely walks, sitting in his place in the House of Lords while men talked whenever his thoughts turned to the great question that filled his life—these two ways had always been the wind-up of his mental argument. He must live without Helena or with her on the sly. He must merely love her and marry someone else, or love her and take her . . . and marry someone else.

He was assailed by a temptation that crushed all his idealism, scattered all his patience like chaff before a tornado. Good God! why should he endeavour to pose as a sort of angel in the world in which half his brothers made life suit their purposes and were not the mere timorous servants of life? Why should he watch youth and passion and the exquisite joy of love fade and die because Providence had placed him in a position in which he was an anomaly, to which he was temperamentally utterly unsuited, and in which he was asked to sacrifice his liberty of choice—the one person he held dearest on earth? . . . This woman was shrewd, sensible and good. In her was represented at least half the opinion of the

world. She stood for individualism. Her creed was that every man should make his own bed and lie on it, and God help us all. She urged courageous immorality, and held up to scorn the mental immoralist who feared to break the laws because of what people would say. She was not so blind to the simple facts as to put forward the feeble, anæmic theory that life for men and women contained better things than love and the desire to create. . . . She would help. Her house would be at their disposal. He could put off a marriage of convenience until the last possible moment, meet Helena as often as could be arranged at the villa at St. Malo, and do the uttermost justice to youth and the high passion that goes with a great urgent love.

And while he paced, aflame and thirsty, unable any longer to endure the bonds of duty and convention, Helena sat very still, with her hands held tightly by the woman who would have given so much to be her mother, and who yet held up before her the allurement and the glamour of self-indulgence. Through her starved mind all Clive's thoughts were running helter-skelter. She loved and desired him. She needed his constant presence, and the warmth and comfort of his arms. The maternal instinct in her pined unbearably for his children. She was passionately jealous of his absence. Her soul and body and spirit and heart cried out aloud for his touch, his companionship. He was hers by all the urgencies of nature. Why should she tamely and humbly submit to the autocratic hand of something that called itself Fate, when by simply and easily slipping from its grasp, she would revel in life and its one great essential joy? Was she, for no other reason than that it had been blessed by an unscrupulous church—for surely a church must be unscrupulous that permitted such a man as Harwich to marry her?—eke out her best years as a pseudo wife, the butt for hourly cynicisms, the one object of constant

Machiavellian cruelty? Other women took love when it came and gave great thanks. Other good women held love higher than the laws that had been made for all, and permitted no just allowance for exceptions.

And when Clive went suddenly to her side—the closeness of him firing her blood and making her tremble—she drew her hands away from Lady Luxminster, rose and went into his arms and gave him her eyes to read.

The woman with the blazing hair and the golden heart left them together.

Clive read, but refused to believe.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I love you," she said.

"Well enough to break vows and risk the loss of respect?"

"I love you utterly," she said.

"And then to see me go to another woman and give her my children?"

"I love you with all my soul," she said, but she quivered as if struck.

"Then let's take all that life can give while we can."

"I love you," she said.

VI

THE following afternoon a dog-cart met Clive and Essendine at the new red-brick station, with its advertisements of soap, tobacco and black-lead, and its paper stall covered with unspeakable cigarettes and packets of chocolate, a collection of cheap editions of old novels, all dog-eared and soiled, and a mass of illiterate, illustrated garbage that proved into what any abyss of inanity the great public had fallen.

Essendine eyed curiously the rapid, jerry-built, ill-considered spread of the town through which they drove,

noting the remnants of the little old, solid, sleepy place that had been so familiar to him in his youth.

He waved his hand. "The same story everywhere," he said. "In place of the historic House of Lords, which acts as a buffer against the jerry-built measures of charlatans and party politicians, the democrats would erect a red-brick debating-hall to train men to politics who ought to be honest carpenters and plumbers. Here they've fastened on your old village, scrapped the fine old houses, mainly because they are fine, and run up five little hideous, ill-drained rabbit warrens on the site of one good serviceable house, and desecrated the streets with an electric tramway that cannot pay its expenses. It's down with the old and good, and up with new and cheap to-day. God help this country! The inevitable swing of the pendulum, I suppose. The tide rises slowly to its fall, pauses and turns. England is going down with the tide. . . . Don't you care for motors, Clive?"

Clive laughed a little ruefully. "Rather!" he said. "But we can't run to one these days."

Essendine nodded sympathetically. "If the spirit of your grandfather ever walks round the old house in the silent hours before sunrise, it must be with a very pricking conscience. Your father told me once that he not only gambled away every available shilling that he could lay hands on, but sold the village, which by some curious mischance was not entailed, to the speculative builder. But for him . . ."

Clive heaved an impatient sigh. "Don't let's even mention the word money during the next few days. Sir Edmund, I'm sick of the sound of it. . . . Is it true that you're retiring from active work soon?"

"Perfectly true. I've been more or less an exile from home for more years than you can remember, and I think it's time I put the reins in younger hands. I have a fancy for settling down in my own little place and walk-

ing round it to watch things grow. I shall be a little lonely, perhaps very lonely, and I'm afraid that I shall often wish that I had thought less about career and more about happiness. The satisfaction about having climbed to the top of your tree dulls considerably when you wake up to find yourself the sole occupant of your nest. With a wife and children. . . . However, I've not come down to weary you with my grumbles. Before we change the subject, Clive, my dear fellow, I want to give you, not a word of advice—it's a young man's privilege never to take advice from an old one—but a word of warning. Whatever else you do, see to it early that you shall not stand in your late years with regret as a bed-fellow. Ambition, career, wealth, honours are all in vain without the love of a woman."

Clive turned a pair of eyes on his guest that were so filled with passion and a face that was so blazingly alight with a sort of expectancy that Essendine's blood moved more quickly, and he told himself that his warning was not needed in this case. He was one who made no attempt ever to peer through the chinks of the armour that most men wear. He told himself that this young man, whose wife must be one who could replenish the empty coffers of the family, had by a singular stroke of luck found his mate. Well, it was the rule of life that there shall always be compensation. To the blind man there is given a blessed content, to the deaf a keen sense of taste, to the weak an unconquerable faith in future health. If, in his difficult and unendurable position, Clive had a mistress whose eyes lighted up at his approach and whose love supplied him with courage, who, but a Pharisee, could hold up hands in horror and cry out: "Woe to him"?

When the cart turned into the old park the great trees were flinging long shadows over the grass. All of them, once more, were clothed in a mass of young green leaves,

their latest children. At the end of the avenue there stood the old house, from whose high chimney stacks the aroma of time seemed to flow with gentle dignity. As Essendine watched it growing as they went nearer and nearer, its austerity and asceticism melted under the soft witchery of the afternoon sun. The dispassionate march of history had left it almost unwrinkled and unhurt, but like some old man who, retaining all his senses, cannot realize that the grave is near. With a fantastic incongruity that was almost unbelievable, and yet noble and beautiful, to one who had watched closely and from the perspective of foreign lands, the quick and dangerous undertow of thought in his own, it stood as a symbol of former greatness, as a rather touching evidence and revelation of the inevitable change that is brought about by the half-digested theories and practices of so-called progression. It spoke of medieval strength and autocracy, of centuries of almost unquestioned power and aristocratic rule, and remained, high and dry, like a vessel upon a sandbank, washed with the ever-rising waters of decadence, on the verge of its break-up.

For the first time since he had come so cruelly into the place, Clive looked at it with more kindly and less impatient eyes. He must eventually become its slave, a victim to the fetich of family, a temporary holder of the title that went with it; one whose prime duty was not to live his own life for himself, but for the heir that should come after him. But not yet—not before he had lived a little for himself and the girl he loved with such all-pervading force. He and she had definitely decided at last to turn a cold shoulder on fate; to wander away from the long, white, remorseless road and take with them into the quiet places that stretched away to the right and left the key to happiness, short-lived though it must be. They would come back with irresoluble memories that would help them both on their prescribed journey. They would

have had their day. It was good to know that they had arrived finally at this conclusion, and that he and she were to meet on his return to London and in the sight of the Master to become one.

It was in high spirits, therefore, that Clive led Sir Edmund up the old rubbed steps and into the great hall, with its faded tapestries and suits of armour and tattered banners, all under the glamour of the warm light that streamed through its western windows.

The mother and the little grey woman met them with mellow welcome.

VII

WITHOUT looking at Clive, and with a too carefully prepared disinterest, Lady Emily led the talk round to the Kirbys, when, after dinner, they all four sat on the terrace. Essendine spoke with rather more than his usual cordiality about them, and described the girl and her amazing eagerness to see things, her delightful *naïveté,* found only in the American girl whose mother and father have cut the foolish and dangerous word "freedom" out of their domestic dictionaries, and her personal charm with the sure touch of the artist. He knew that his small audience were very well aware of the fact that she and her parents were under discussion for a reason, and although he was as careful as a cat on hot bricks not to put her forward as a possible wife for Clive, he went out of his way to paint all her advantages for that position, including money.

Clive listened with a sort of subconscious ear. He agreed with Essendine about Cornelia Kirby. She was an exceptionally nice girl, who wore her clothes well, was obviously devoted and unnationally polite to her father and mother, and never laughed too loudly. She was un-English enough to be interesting without being

foreign, and if her accent was rich enough to cut with a knife, the things she said were all touched with a sense of fun and the joy of life that made her worth listening to. But Clive's brain had flown out like a homing-pigeon to Helena, and excitement churned his blood as the screw of a racing motor-boat churns and flurries the water.

To the mother and the little grey woman the description had a vivid and even tragic interest. How intensely it went against the grain of these two proud women to be obliged to consider the immediate necessity of taking a stranger into the family, to bargain for the sale of their name.

For once a thin painful thread of purely egotistical thought was running through Lady Emily's brain. It was painful because with it was carried all the poignant regret of a woman who has given her heart to a man who has not been aware of the gift, and who was well content merely to retain her among his friends. Since she was sixteen she had loved Essendine. A few years older than herself, he was in the habit of spending most of his holidays at Sumptermead with her brother, who was his close friend. As a lanky Etonian, continually shooting out of his clothes, he had pulled her hair; condescended on rare occasions to lie at her feet under the shade of the trees and read chapters from "Tom Brown's School-days," or "Robinson Crusoe." As a tall and nonchalant undergraduate, a man of twenty-one, to whom life and death and the great hereafter held no mystery, he had only metaphorically pulled her hair and indulged in the horseplay of words. As he ripened, broadened, and found himself beneath the hard-baked stucco of public-school and university training, and began, with a sort of surprise, to find something in the universe that was far bigger even than the standards and prejudices of his own class had led him to believe, her love for him grew out of its first girlish reverence and hero-worship and

settled down into a strong and unshakable permanence. And so it had remained during all the years that had passed insidiously over them both, leaving them as they were now, a little humble and a little tired, in the autumn of life. And as she sat that evening and looked from him to one of the plump and dimpled stone cupids on the terrace that stood in a roguish and mischievous attitude, stringing an arrow, she asked herself with natural bitterness why it was that one of his cruel-sweet shafts had pierced her heart and left Essendine's untouched. The fact that she had kept her secret locked against all prying or sympathetic eyes made it no less painful to see when she opened her treasure-box from time to time. If he had returned her love there was no sacrifice that she would not have made for him, no law that she would not have broken; and even if circumstances had made it impossible for them to have married, she knew that she would have been his wife in everything but name.

What, then, could she say to Clive, or think of Clive, if, supposing that he were to marry Essendine's American girl, he found his happiness with Helena? She looked at the boy as he sat in the pale light of the moon, and catching something in his face that told her where his thoughts had gone, moved her chair so that she could run a tender, sympathetic and understanding hand through his arm. She stood for the family and the future of the family. She would urge him, well knowing what it would mean to the boy, to marry some such a girl as this Miss Kirby. The introduction of new, clean, unsophisticated blood would do good rather than harm. The money was more urgently needed than even he supposed. But she also stood for love—she, who had missed its fulfilment, whose empty heart echoed with pattering feet of babes, and who was now standing alone with her eyes turned back along a vista of wasted years. Conceive what would be said of her by those hard-and-fast moral-

ists who doggedly and wrongheadedly refused to allow human beings to be human, if they could have heard her say to Minnie Luxminster, as she must have said: "Your advice is right, my dear. Love is strong as death. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it."

Clive came back to Sumptermead and to the old constant problem at the touch of her hand. He knew from long experience how sympathetic it was towards him. He raised it to his lips and then spread it, delicate, sensitive, capable and blue-veined, on the back of his own. The mother and Sir Edmund were in deep confabulation.

"Do you remember that I'm going to be twenty-seven on Thursday?" he asked.

"Do I remember!"

"Thank God I've got plenty of time before I shall have to forget that I'm a man and become a mere figurehead, a sort of duke. . . . Let's get some exercise, shall we?"

"Yes," she said. "By all means. After dinner walk a mile, eh?"

"That's the notion." She was up before he could help her. He put her hand back on his arm and together they paced the wide, moon-splashed terrace. "I don't feel like sitting to-night," he added. "If I had an aeroplane I'd make a journey to the sky, light a cigarette at the moon and pick a star."

The little grey woman pulled the conversation back to earth. "Did you say plenty of time?" she asked.

Clive laughed and made a wide gesture as though throwing something far from him. "Yes, I did," he said. "Plenty." He put his arm round her to make her dance and sang the air of a popular waltz.

"No, no, dear boy," she said. "My dancing days are over."

"Bosh! Nothing's over. Everything's beginning. Now, then. . . ."

He sang again. Suddenly his eyes caught the unusual nakedness of the hand he held.

"Hullo!" he said. "Since when have you given up wearing your rings?"

In a flash the hand went behind Lady Emily's back. The other followed it. And instantly she called herself a fool. The boy's quick eyes had caught her necklacelessness. It was a habit of hers to be very feminine at night and to wear her diamonds. They reminded her that, after all, she was a woman.

"You've done something with your things," cried Clive.

"No, I haven't."

"Then where are they?"

"What's that to you?"

"Tell me the truth."

"I shall tell you nothing."

"I insist."

She sent out a scoffing laugh. She was as angry as he was. "Hoighty-toighty! Insist, indeed! Try it on, my dear."

He put his hands on her shoulders and held her so that the light of the moon was on her face. "What is all this? Tell me."

"Your intuition is almost uncanny," she said irritably. "However, I advise you to let things be. You just said that you had plenty of time before you need settle down. Well, if you really think so, don't inquire any further about my rings and things. Go headlong into your fool's paradise and remain there as long as you can."

Clive stood looking down at her for a moment. Should he let things slide? Should he shift his responsibilities to the delicate shoulders of this woman and his mother? No, it wasn't possible. "Come up with me to my room," he said, and led the way. At the end of the terrace a

narrow door opened into his staircase. Lady Emily followed him up. She knew that what was going to be said in his old and curious room must affect the whole future of the family as well as Clive's present plans, whatever they might be. She stood very upright while he lighted some of the candles. There was something rather grim about the set of her mouth, although her heart all went out to the boy in his difficulties.

"What have you done?" he asked. "Please tell me."

"It's all too easy," she said quietly. "You know that George put me in charge of his wedding arrangements, don't you? Since then I have looked after the business of this house and the estate for you. So that I know better than you do precisely how things stand. Well, the wedding was a big expense. By the time all the bills were paid there was precious little ready money in the bank to go on with. Then there was the funeral. . . . Since then I have reduced the staff of servants and given up the car and economized in every possible way. Your mother and I agreed that we couldn't speak to you of marriage—the only way that seems open to you to bring in money—for several months. In the meantime, you have your allowance, and a report comes in that the repairs to the west wing must be carried out unless it is to be allowed to fall into a hopeless state of ruin. The day you met me in Piccadilly I was on my way to the bank to pay in the money I had raised by selling my diamonds. It was a little over two thousand pounds. With that the repairs can be begun. I had no need for diamonds, and as a Hurbert I have a perfect right to spend my money as I choose."

"My God!" cried Clive. "Are things as bad as this?"

"Worse," said Lady Emily, whose family feeling and responsibility made it imperative to tell the whole truth at last. "A series of bad harvests have driven poor Elswich into bankruptcy. That means that we are getting

no rent from the largest of the farms. The other tenants are all in a bad way. When they can pay their rents they do. When they can't, they simply can't, and there's an end to it. All the same, land-taxes have to be paid and repairs fall upon us. As time goes on everything that isn't entailed must be sold, piece by piece, to enable us to live and pay wages. We can never recover from the disloyal self-indulgence of your grandfather. We can merely stand by with folded hands in impotent despair, unless you say to yourself: 'Which thing am I going to do? Drift and steal happiness in secret, or stand by the family of which I am the head and sacrifice self?' "

Yet once again, as he looked into the face of this good woman and saw it touched with something of the nobility that comes forth from the soul of every human being who has discovered that life is, and must be, a trust, a short span to be worked out to the best of all possible effort, for those who are to follow, Clive asked himself why it was that every time he made up his mind to break the rules the great umpire seemed to guess his intention and turn upon him a face filled with surprise and disappointment.

One thing was obvious. He must do what was expected of him without loss of time. His aunt had sold jewels. It was an act that flicked him forward like a whip. Even if that had not happened her plain statement of facts would have been sufficient to send him back to London strung up to the realization of his duty. He would go to London. He would, as soon as it was decent —sooner, because he was in no position to be squeamish—offer marriage to the Kirbys' daughter, and if they accepted him—and there was no certainty about that as dukes were going cheap—he would be honest and faithful to her. But—and this rang out in his brain—first he would go to Helena. Providence asked much of him,

the family asked everything of him; but neither had the right to ask him to lay the one great love of his life on the altar of responsibility.

"You shall not have to stand by with folded hands," he said to the little grey woman. "I am as much a Hurbert as you are."

They took each other's hands in silence.

VIII

THE week-end was not wasted. Essendine was taken into the family council. Clive and Lady Emily had long talks with him, sitting under the shadow of the old house which seemed to be straining its ears to listen, as it had the right to do. It was discovered, by ringing up the Coburg Hotel, that the Kirbys were staying over Sunday on the borders of the next county at a house rented by Mrs. Alvin Morten of New York. All his matchmaking instincts fired, Essendine suggested hiring the best car the town could produce, and driving over to bring the Kirbys and their hostess back to lunch. Let them see the place and its beauty, he said, and go away with the wonder of its history upon them. So Clive sent a telegram on Saturday making the invitation, which, in due course, they accepted with extreme pleasure.

The park was at its best and freshest when the Kirby party was driven through it. In his airiest manner Essendine placed a metaphorical megaphone to his mouth, as he had seen the man do on the rubber-neck tourist cars in America, and dropped interesting little bits of history into eager ears. Kirby's grandfather was a Yorkshireman and a farmer, and what English blood there was in his veins tingled at the sight of this peculiarly English place, whose dignity was so simple and unaffected. Mrs. Kirby, who had never left her native land

before, or been in the habit of meeting anyone with a higher title than "Judge" and "Colonel," sat very quiet and watchful, made perhaps a little less sure of herself from the fact that Mrs. Alvin Morten considered herself to be quite English, and talked incessantly with an accent that was almost comic in its imitation. Cornelia thought everything "perfectly fine" with contagious enthusiasm and delight.

The house, with its old masters, and beautiful collections of armour, silver, china and tapestries, its age and its story, left them all without words. But they found the dowager Duchess and Lady Emily so like any other affectionate little family, so quietly cordial and so—to them, with their stage and novel notions of English aristocracy—simple and unsidey, that even Mrs. Kirby was very soon discussing servant troubles with the little mother, and telling the story of her early struggles to Lady Emily, when she cooked Madison's meals herself and washed his underclothes. With an uncharacteristic lack of that quaint vanity which causes most successful Americans to tell the amazing history of their rise to riches, having begun, as they mostly have, by selling papers in the streets—as many millionaires sold papers in the streets as there were passengers on the *Mayflower*—Kirby talked golf and shooting.

His long training in diplomacy made it clear to Essendine that the thin edge of the wedge could be inserted in no better way than by making Mrs. Alvin Morten understand, by a few almost distrait remarks, that Clive was on the look-out for a wife. He had no doubt but that she, an obvious tuft-hunter and under a complete obsession as to titles, would talk Clive and Sumptermead to Cornelia's parents for the rest of their stay with her.

It was easy to see that Madison Kirby had taken to Clive. He was equally caught by the beauty and the history of the house. The two struck up a friendship.

Both men were clean and fit and honest, and each recognized these things in the other. Cornelia, too, made a hit—as she afterwards said with laughing mouth—with the two elderly ladies, and the result of this brief visit was an invitation to stay for a week at Sumptermead, which was accepted with delight.

When, finally, the car turned into the avenue and rapidly became a speck in the distance, the little mother and Lady Emily turned to each other.

"Well?" asked the little grey woman, with a rather whimsical smile at the corners of her mouth.

"A nice girl, my dear. A very nice girl. And Mr. Kirby is a gentleman and a fine fellow."

"I agree. Well?"

The Dowager put her white fingers rather nervously together. "Did they like us, do you think? Do you suppose that we may hope for . . . anything from this visit? Is there any chance of . . . of something happening, Em dear?"

Lady Emily shot out a dry laugh. "What a sign of the times!" she said. "Here we stand, we two, as nervous and as expectant as two old hens, trying to persuade ourselves into believing that these wealthy democrats may make an offer for our name and place and history, and buy Clive, as they would buy an old master. Not long ago the nervousness and expectancy were all on the other side. Dearie, it's high time that you and I slipped out of these changing and Gilbertian days. We are relics of a period that is dead and done with. We have lived too long."

That night Clive was very quiet. He had driven the car back to Mrs. Morten's hired house with Cornelia by his side. He thought her a charming, frank, straightforward girl, and knew, without vanity or egotism, that she liked him, and was as crazy about him as she had

expressed herself as being about the house and the park and his mother, Lady Emily and the dogs. He had already been enlightened by Essendine as to the significance of that American word, and so knew its value. But he also knew that he had only to exert himself while this high enthusiasm and glamour were upon her, only to pay her compliments and feed her frankly-confessed vanity, and be as agreeable as he well knew how, to bring to a rapid end the money difficulties with which he and the family were surrounded. He stood outside himself once again and saw himself deliberately entering into what could easily be made to result in a false alliance, a business marriage, a cold bargain, with nausea. He cursed the wretched title that hung like a millstone round his neck, and stood solidly between him and everything that made life worth living—that made it impossible for him to enter the struggle for existence unhandicapped, to compete in the great race with the same chance of winning as belonged to his fellow-starters. Having done that, and done it with the excellent choice of words that is only acquired at Oxford, he got back into his skin. He was a damned duke and nothing, certainly no vain regrets or recriminations or whinings, could alter the fact. As such, he must play the duke game. Very well. There were always two ways of playing it, according to the rules and like a blackleg. He would stick to the rules, and if this little American girl thought it worth her while to become his wife, and in return for his title and a seat at his table rehabilitate his finances, he would be faithful. He would follow as well as he was able in George's footsteps. In the meantime——

And here he went to his room and wrote a little burning letter to Helena, confirming his acceptance of Lady Luxminster's invitation to stay in Curzon Street for a fortnight. His whole personal life was, then, to be concentrated into two short weeks. During these few brief

days he was to be Clive Hurbert, the lover, the man who brought to a consummation the great passion of his life. Afterwards, he would retire and become merely the Duke of Cheshire, a good husband, a good father, a good landlord, a regular attendant at the somewhat farcical House of his brother peers, with the key of his heart in the hands of the woman who would be, at least in the eyes of the Father of all humanity, his true wife.

IX

THE same day found Helena alone in Curzon Street. The Luxminsters had gone off to Henley for a day on the river with cousins of Arthur's. For several reasons Minnie set herself to persuade Helena to go with them. For one thing it was Sunday, and this shrewd woman, who knew of all the years the girl had spent under the influence and example of a devout clergyman, and a fine, simple man, dreaded the sudden awakening of the uncomfortable something she scoffingly called conscience. She would rather have her under her own eyes. For another, she considered that it would do her good and relieve the pressure of excitement if she saw new people and new objects, and was obliged to talk the inanities of polite conversation. And then she said, as a final argument: "Dash it, honey, I'm not more of a snob than any other woman in any other country, but I should dearly love to have the beautiful, young, much-discussed Duchess of Harwich under my wing. So won't you come? Do, my darlin'. Think of the reflected glory for me."

But Helena refused. She begged to be let off. It was with great reluctance and a superstitious feeling that something would go wrong—she had spilt the salt at breakfast and Arthur had seen the new moon through

glass, "you idiot"—that Lady Luxminster left Helena alone in London.

Helena had never craved to be alone so much. To-morrow Clive would be under the same roof. From to-morrow for two weeks he and she were going to give up trying to be good—Lady Luxminster called it "imitating the angels and putting themselves, for no reason at all, among inhuman people." From to-morrow they were going to accept the beliefs of the super-individualist, to whom nothing is wrong that is desired, even if it has always been and still is to others illegal or immoral. They were going frankly to lay down their arms and idealism and confess themselves beaten. Without putting up any specious arguments or using any new words of this or that ism, they were going to burn their boats. They needed each other and could wait no longer. Providence had tied them up in a knot so subtle and so intricate, that it was utterly hopeless to endeavour to undo it. They could not free themselves even by cutting it. All that they could do was to steal a short honeymoon and then go their separate ways, tied hand and foot to circumstances.

Clive recognized this honestly and so did Helena. He was waiting for to-morrow with all the natural excitement and joy of a child of the slums who is going to be taken to the sea for the first time. Clive loved her no more passionately than she loved Clive. Nature, who recognizes no laws, and is the most super-individualist of them all, drove her before a very gale of long resisted desire. And now that it had been mutually decided upon to capitulate, she was happy. She wanted to spend the day alone walking on air. She wanted to devote this last day undisturbed to a kind of love-chant, an incantation of life-long devotion to the man whose spirit had come to hers when she was too young to know why. It

was all very wonderful and young, and natural and beautiful and pathetic.

Not once did she stop and ask herself any practical question. What had practicality to do with love? She went out alone into the dull London streets and into Hyde Park, where the glamour of the sun melted the stiff lines of green seats and danced in a golden haze between the black-barked trees. And there was a song in her heart and on her lips, and love in her eyes.

At the feet of Achilles early comers had already taken their places to watch the church parade. Frocks and parasols in all the light colours made an herbaceous-like bank beneath the bronze giant whose distrait eyes had seen so many changes in the old town, its customs and its people. A blaze of almost too well-regulated colours came from the geometrical beds that were cut in the smooth, jealously-treated turf that lined the paths. Everywhere there were people, walking slowly, taking breath, as it seemed between races. In the distance the smooth Serpentine looked like carefully polished silver.

Delighting in the flowers and the excellent gardening with all the keen appreciation of one who was country-bred, and with a curious warm sense of fellowship towards all who passed, Helena swung across towards Marble Arch. The lilt of distant traffic fitted with her mood. She stopped for a moment to watch the crowd of indifferent people who stood twenty deep round several wagons. These were drawn up on a large open stretch of dry grass, and acted as rostrums for several gesticulating women, who were wasting their breath and casting pebbles into the sea by urging women's suffrage upon persons whose interest in the question had been killed by hysterical and mistaken outbursts of anarchy and orgies of self-advertisement. There were few among those mildly curious listeners who did not agree that in a country unwise enough to have given a vote to the ignorant

as well as to the educated, women, mostly illiterate, had the right to make chaos more complete if they chose, but words were wasted upon them when deeds proved unfitness. They listened merely because it was Sunday, and the sun was shining and there was an hour or two to kill before dinner.

Helena moved on, and as she went she seemed to herself to be walking in step with Clive. The beauty of the day awoke in her mind the wonder of their love. She threw her mind back to that evening that appeared to be so far behind her when she had looked up suddenly and found him. She went all over again their talk in the fog, when she held out her hand with its wedding-ring and was amazed that she should have had the courage to let it stand between them. She had no regret now. Regret had no place in her heart. She revived every word and object of that bizarre scene in the palm court at Cardinals, of the journey to London and the run to the coast. Was it possible that they had been torn apart then for any reason? So far as reason went, she was another man's wife. But who was sufficiently interested in them to kill a man on his honeymoon in order to drag Clive back to duty? Sometimes it had seemed to her that it might have been fate. But, if fate was the agent of God, He was not the good master in whose little house she had sat Sunday after Sunday for so many eager years. It was accident, mischance—nothing else.

She drew up short. The word God, that meant so much to her, had come inevitably into her mind. It has a way of coming into the mind in all the big, vital moments of life. It now came to her at the top of a thin, screaming voice, not as one that spells sympathy and forgiveness, but as a menace. "God's commandments are the iron door into Himself," she heard. "To keep them is to have it opened, and His great heart of love revealed."

Beyond a phalanx of hats she saw the head and shoulders of a grizzled man, whose lined face was flushed and whose deep-set, tubercular eyes gleamed unhealthily. His thin, quivering hand was all stretched, and he reached forward as though trying to bring into his audience everyone in sight. It was obviously an appalling effort for him to use his voice loudly; but in its hollowness there was the splendid, thrilling ring of utter conviction, and of faith that compelled him to stand up on perhaps the lip of the grave, and make himself heard in the callous world which looked upon him as a fanatic and had forgotten God. His words tumbled headlong after each other. The passion of his belief, added to the unmistakable stamp of death upon his forehead, held his audience spell-bound.

Helena would have run away with her hands over her ears if she had been able. But this man held her eyes and seemed to be speaking to her. It was uncanny, dreadful, inspiring.

"God comes at the very moment when we think He is farthest off," he cried exultantly. "You don't believe it until the man or woman you love has been touched on the shoulder by death, and then you fling your tear-stained face in the dust at His feet and cry out for mercy. God is where He was, but you go through every day of your lives with all the evidences of His work and service under your noses, in your cradles, on your tables, in the sky at night, on the grasses in the morning, and you won't believe. You muddle along, a unit of an increasingly callous and cynical swarm, and your god is either your food or your drink or your tobacco. The only altar you worship at is the altar that gives you immediately the thing you want at the moment. No other altar is the smallest use to you. Say that you get what you want and then only by fetching it, do you ever remember to give God thanks? What if you don't get it? Ah, then

you go on your knees pretty quickly, don't you, and ask God to be your friend. God visits you all, whether you deserve it or not, but nearly all the time you are not at home. You know this, some of you who have eyes and commonsense, and who haven't forgotten that you were born of a woman; but you try and make yourselves believe that if you remain away God will not go farther than your doorsteps. You don't want Him to see how far you have gone from the simple belief you held as children. You hope not to be caught red-handed in seduction or cheating, or neglect of duty. And when you are about to commit some act that you know to be wrong and shameful and against God's Commandments, you put your back against the wall and say: 'Prove that there is a God,' or, 'If God is love, as you say He is, He will forgive me, because I don't profess to be anything but weak and very human.' God does not require us to live on credit. He pays what we earn as we earn it, good or evil, heaven or hell, according to our choice. Choose the easiest way and see how rough it becomes. Choose love that cannot be fulfilled honestly, and according to the laws of God, and then see it all fade and die under the shame that will inevitably fall on you. If you men remembered the existence of God in the world and in heaven, all the misery that you give to women under the name of love would be spared them; all the cruelty that you mete out to little children would never be committed. You who are the creatures of a lax and undisciplined age, who are only too willing and eager to swallow the easy, new religions that make sin and self-indulgence easy, and that glorify man and leave God out, that invent excuses for breaking laws and raise ego to the highest place, take this truth home with you to-day: *God is greater than man,* and if you think that this is a relic of barbarism, a foolish, old-fashioned, old woman's saying, I ask you to turn your eyes to the sea and find,

if you can, that colossal, magnificent liner that went out crowded with self-complacent people, with 'We fear not God' scrawled in chalk upon its boilers. The *Titanic* was greater than nature, was she? And so little was there need to fear God that she could go full-speed through icebergs, with the band playing. Ask yourselves, if you dare, why she went to the bottom of the sea. God is greater than man, and I tell you that he or she, or institution, or country, or ship, or aeroplane, that is so clever and modern and scientific or impregnable as to think differently, feels the stern, correcting hand of God in a way that should make his name feared as well as loved. Listen to me, you people, for I am a man marching forward handcuffed to death, and I speak with intuition and with a faith that lifts my soul out of regret and recrimination. Take God back into your lives and homes and into your business, and with you in your love. Put Him once again into your nurseries and schools, so that young children shall grow up with a sense of discipline and self-control. *You* may have fallen. See in this way that they shall not. Give God to your boys so that they shall respect even the women they love most, and to your girls, so that they shall not think so little of their virtue as to debase it for whatever purpose. God gives us love. Something to love He sends us, but when love is grown to ripeness that on which it throve falls off and love is left alone. One other thing you shall be reminded of before I leave you. God hath yoked to guilt her pale enemy, misery, and if you don't believe me—wait."

He remained for a moment fighting for breath, with that thin, quivering hand stretched out, and then got down, pushed his way through the crowd and went away, staggering.

That night when Lady Luxminster returned to the little white-and-green house in Curzon Street, she found

a note from Helena lying on her dressing-table. It was very short and was stained with tears. She began to read it aloud to the astonished Arthur: "It's no use. I have written to Clive. I have gone back to Cardinals." . . . and there she stopped. The rest was too much a part of a girl's wounded and exalted soul for curious ears.

PART V

I

THE *Morning Post* of November the second contained a small paragraph, which set all the pens of newspaper gossipers at work and revived the story of George's death. It ran:

> "The engagement is announced between Miss Cornelia Kirby, only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Madison G. Kirby, of New York City and Miami, Florida, to His Grace the Duke of Cheshire."

Then followed photographs in the weekly illustrated papers of "the newest engagement," and the usual hopeless stuff apparently concocted for people of no intelligence about Miss Kirby as a sportswoman, Miss Kirby, the most beautiful girl in America, Miss Kirby, the heiress to a vast number of dollars. The ladies' papers all used the word "romance," and weaved about the heads of Clive and Nina a pattern of ludicrous sentimentality as intricate as the black-and-white design that dribbled round their pictures. One so-called Society paper came out with a long article headed "Our Poverty-Stricken Dukes," in which it glibly set forth the details of Clive's income, the sum that was needed to put Sumptermead into good order, and the amount of money that Mr. Kirby was going to pay for the pleasure of seeing his daughter's name in American papers as the Duchess of Cheshire. One evening Unionist paper, more staunch to

party politics than anxious to preserve good form, used the engagement as a weapon with which to flay Mr. Cranston and his Nonconformist conscience, and his "ill-fated attempt to sneak through a back door into a set against which he had inveighed all his life in public and whose boots he gladly licked in private." It made unpleasant and unkind reading.

Clive made a point of seeing none of them. He guessed what they all contained, and that was bad enough. He was thankful that he liked and respected Kirby and his wife, that his engagement to Cornelia gave them infinite pleasure and satisfaction, altogether apart from the fact that he was a duke, and that Cornelia herself got along with him very well. His talk with Kirby was characteristic of them both and added to the esteem in which each held the other.

As Essendine surmised, Mrs. Morten did dangle in front of the Kirby noses the glamour of Sumptermead, but she did nothing more than fire the ambition of Mrs. Kirby. Cornelia, who was brought into the many discussions, laughed, said that it was a "dandy" idea, and gave grave imitations of her notion of the ways and manners of an English duchess that made her father's big, fine laugh set all the pictures quivering. Inwardly, being, as she imagined, heart-whole, and having in front of her mental eyes a picture of Clive which was very charming, she was a little thrilled and excited at the mere possibility of becoming so important a person as the Duchess of Cheshire. But she conceived the whole thing to be one of Mrs. Morten's little dreams, and gave herself up to an enthusiastic and healthy enjoyment of the moment, leaving the future to take care of itself. Kirby told his wife not to think about it. He agreed that Sumptermead was a wonderful old place, and that, all things being equal, he would rather that his little girl married a man who counted than a mere nice boy who

could give her very little. But he said that not even the title of queen would tempt him to jeopardize Nina's future happiness. If Clive turned out to be as good a fellow as he seemed to be, and Nina took a fancy to him, why, well and good. He would then have nothing to say except bless you, my children, and make things comfortable for them. That was his attitude, and he made it clear in his own absolutely frank, honest and simple way.

Then followed their visit to Sumptermead, during which they were put on more than equal terms with the two dear elderly ladies and Clive, who made, thrown back by Helena's letter, no attempt to be nicer to Cornelia than he would have been to any other girl who was a guest in his house. Mostly he was with Kirby, playing golf. But whether it was due to the atmosphere, to the long, sweet-scented nights, to the delicious old rose-gardens, to the peculiar hush and peace of the old house, and to Clive's quiet and perfectly frank treatment of her or what, the girl began to fall under the spell. The restless desire to be doing something, which was natural in a girl who had lived in a continual atmosphere of turkey-trotting and motoring and among people whose one idea of pleasure was to keep things moving, was, at first, dispelled. She was dazed at being intimately among the people whose doings and names and houses she had read about in papers and novels. The deferential servants who said "your Grace" and "your Ladyship" impressed her. There was, too, something surprisingly real about these English people and this English home. They never tried to do anything, either to convey impressions that were false or to advertise their history and their position. They were so sure of themselves that they seemed to eliminate self from all consideration. They had the faculty, the gift that only goes with long years of pre-eminence, of being quiet. They could sit still for hours at a time talking impersonalities. They were not

frozen, or difficult, or stiff, as she had supposed. They, and everything that was theirs, were altogether at the disposal of their guests, but they never once harried them into doing things or drove them into enjoyment to the crack of the too hospitable whip. If they had troubles they were not ventilated. If they were extremely happy they did not analyze it. With a little humorous smile they darted away from the approach of ego like very cool, well-bred fish. They seemed to think that it was so well understood that, if they had not been prepared to extend a most cordial welcome to their guests, they wouldn't be under the roof, and that their guests were equally glad to be there; that it was totally unnecessary to indulge in simulated boisterousness, or to work up a false condition of high spirits with the aid of whisky. All this was to Cornelia very new, different, surprising, and at first refreshing. She found herself able, if she chose, to wander about the old gardens alone and unpestered. She was never asked "what she would like to do now." She did what she liked when she liked. The glamour and the fragrance of the place and its peaceful, assured atmosphere sank into her. She gradually began to find Clive's protective brotherliness and curious touch of respect and his lack of anything in the nature of flirtation as new and different and surprising as everything else—a little disappointing and disconcerting too. Hitherto she had always been uncomfortably made aware of the fact that she was feminine. The question of sex had always immediately been introduced in her most casual dealings with men. But as soon as she began to realize that she liked to be with Clive, and that she missed him when he was away all day with her father, some of her young, colt-like restlessness at the lack of movement of the place came back. When Clive was at her disposal she was perfectly happy. He was young and he was someone. He stood for something, and he was, as Mrs.

Morten said, a *parti*, eyed by hundreds of match-making women. Apart from all this, his good looks attracted her. His unselfconscious ease and assurance piqued her curiosity and her girlish vanity. She began subconsciously to dress for him, to look her best for him, and finally, with a touch of wilfulness, to arouse his interest and focus his usually somewhat distrait attention. And then her alert, keenly-strung brain went off in another direction. Her youthful romance became alight and astir. She wanted to mistake Clive's friendship and quiet intimacy for love because she had persuaded herself that she was in love with him. At her age this kind of persuasion was natural enough and easy enough, especially when there was no other man indispensably in her heart; and so, during the last evening she became sentimental—the moon was full—and all agog with a sudden excitement—her ambition was stirring. She felt a sense of impending loss and jealousy at the prospect of leaving the old beautiful house, the two ladies who treated her as one of the family, and Clive, who put her so much on the qui-vive. She told herself that if Clive asked her to be his wife, she would accept him. She was now "crazy" about him and the place, "crazy" to be called "your Grace," and treated almost like royalty. And what an intense pleasure she would take in waking things up and making them buzz. How she would delight in showing these somewhat rigid people how to live and squeeze every ounce of juice out of every separate minute of the day and night! What possibilities there were for lavish entertainment, tea dances on the terrace, with a specially imported band of negroes who knew how to put the right snap and ginger into rag-time as no one else did—and big dinner-parties in that wonderful hall. She had been bored, she owned to it now, during those long, hazy, scent-blown days. Who was better able to see that no one else should ever suffer from that too ter-

rible malady? "Gee!" she cried inwardly, with a sudden burst of American colloquialism to which she gave way in moments of high tension, "I certainly would make the flies jump if I had the steering-wheel of this machine!" Then, too, wouldn't there be "some" talk in New York if she went back as the prospective Duchess of Cheshire! She called her mother into her bedroom that night, and in an unusual burst of confidence conveyed all these mixed feelings to her. Mrs. Kirby, who had been unable to dismiss from her mind the reiterated suggestions made by Mrs. Morten, and who had been immensely impressed by the social importance of Clive and the age and charm of his place, seized upon Nina's half-emotional youthful confession, and enlarged it to a size that fitted in with her own desire. She was quick to carry the news to her husband. Kirby had had a splendid time. He had found Clive much to his liking. He delighted in the old ladies and had an abiding memory of the place. "Well," he said, "if that's so, let the boy speak. It's pretty quick work for a girl to fall in love, but there, on that point, I'm the last to have anything to say. I loved you at sight, didn't I, my dear?"

The night they left the little grey woman held a long council of war—it seemed to be that to them both—with the mother. They examined, looked into, and diagnosed every incident of the Kirbys' visit. They summed up very much in favour of the American father and mother —Lady Emily's word for Madison Kirby was "corker"— and had nothing but approving things to say of Cornelia. She was a charmingly fresh and natural girl, healthy in mind and body, and but for an unchecked liking for too many rings perfectly suitable in the circumstances. The underlying pathos of this talk, which would have been humorous to most eavesdroppers, was brought up to the surface by the mother when she said, finally: "I

can't help thinking, dear Em, that it's worth their while to let us have the money."

The little grey woman's answer was purely Em-like. "Damn the money, my dear! The girl's fallen in love with Clivey, and if I know anything about it there's a strapping family of young Hurberts in such a marriage. They will be only too glad to dub up and look pleased."

When, later, standing with her back to the old fireplace in Clive's room, she told him this, and urged him, with some excitement, to go in and win, he replied, though with a curious look in his eyes: "Right! Don't worry. I'm not going back on you or my job."

On the contrary, he went forward quickly. He read over Helena's letter once more, as though to gather from it some of the strength that her faith in God and His goodness gave forth, locked her into his heart, and the next day went to London. The Kirbys were going to sail back to America at the end of the following week. Before they left he meant to speak to Kirby, and if he had his permission, to ask Cornelia to be his wife. With clenched teeth he intended to do what was expected of him as George had done it, and now that he had forced passion under control he thanked God that his love for Helena remained the best thing in his life, unspoiled and unsoiled.

He saw the Kirbys every day. He dined with them and took them to the theatre and introduced Kirby to several of his friends. Two nights before they left England he gave Kirby dinner at Arthur's, and in the morning-room, in which his name had first been mentioned by Essendine, came to the point.

He said: "If you don't mind I want to go into a personal matter with you before we say 'good-bye' to-night. May I?"

"Why, certainly," said Kirby, looking at the straight-backed, tall, fit-looking, clean-cut fellow who had put up

several good fights at golf, through his cigar smoke with a smile. "Go ahead. Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," said Clive, "please. I'm going to ask you for your permission to ask Cornelia to marry me." He went on before Kirby could speak. "First, I've got to tell you one or two things, which may have something to do with your decision. I'm not worth anything. I mean I haven't any money. That is, not enough to keep up Sumptermead and do the social game as it is expected of me by some thousands a year. The place wants a lot of money spent on it. Since my grandfather's time land and rents have gone to the devil, and he did in all the money there was. I've managed to keep out of debt, and there's nothing against me in the way of women. I'm twenty-seven and eight months old, and I'm fit and well."

He stood very straight as he said these rather abrupt things, as though standing on his defence before a court-martial. His eyes looked straight into the American's.

Kirby was a little excited and more than a little uncomfortable. He got up and stood in front of Clive, taller by an inch and squarer by several. And he held out a large, capable, sympathetic hand and said: "Thank you for that."

Then he drew back, and they were both silent for a moment. This business must not take on anything of the emotional. They dreaded that.

"I've made up my mind about you as a man," said Kirby, "and if you will permit me to be equally honest, I've been told about your . . . your finances. I guess that's no secret."

"No," said Clive. "Everybody knows it."

"Let me say right here that I'd be glad to see Nina married to you."

"Thanks."

"Not because of the . . . I mean . . ."

"I know," said Clive. "I'm all the more grateful."

Kirby laughed. He was finding it difficult to express himself, and feared that he might stumble from patronage to snobbishness. Then he squared his great shoulders. "I'm sure you understand me. I don't know how to put it without offending you and hating myself."

Then Clive laughed. "It *is* rather difficult, all this, isn't it?" he said boyishly. And in this way some of the ice was broken and both men felt more at ease. Kirby returned to his seat and Clive sat down and twisted his chair to face this admirable big fellow. They both resumed smoking. Clive waited for a question that he knew must come and which he was going to answer with the honesty characteristic of himself and which the American deserved.

It came at once. "I've only one thing to ask. Do you love my girl?"

"No," replied Clive.

Kirby was tremendously taken aback. "You don't!"

"No, Mr. Kirby, I don't."

"Then . . . then, why do you want . . ."

"I'm glad you ask me that, though I should have told you in any case. I can't marry for love like any man who has the luck to be born without the handicap of a title like mine. I've got to marry for money. I like Cornelia. She's your daughter, and I couldn't possibly speak in higher praise of her than that if I were a poet —and I'm not."

Kirby was obviously much disappointed. He shook his head doubtfully and rubbed his fingers over his moustache. "Yes," he said, "I gathered you had to get some money, but I hoped . . . You see, as Nina's father, I can't face the possibility of her being unhappily married, especially as she will live in a foreign—I mean away from her own country. . . . Can I?"

"Of course not," replied Clive. "That's why I'm telling you the truth."

"Yes. Thank you. You see, she likes you. . . ."

"Does she?"

"Mighty well—naturally, and if you can't return it why, it seems to me it would be a pretty bad look-out for her. Wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would. I ought to tell you that I've been in love with another girl for . . . a long time. She's . . . married. And even if she were free I couldn't marry her, because of my responsibility."

"Hard luck!" said Kirby.

Clive held on to his chair and kept his voice steady. "Yes, it is," he said. "However, there it is. But what I can give to Cornelia is absolute faithfulness and very soon, I think, a great affection and respect; and, of course, I shall make it my business—and my pleasure too—to see that she's happy and—all that. I can't afford more, because I haven't got it."

Kirby smiled. A good fellow, this. A real good fellow. "Why," he said, "you've got the title and the place, haven't you? And some men would pay a pretty big figure for them for their daughter."

"It's been done," said Clive. "But *you* wouldn't and I don't want you to. If you consider me at all, it will be because you think I'm honourable and mean to do what I say. I know you don't care a curse about my being a duke."

"Well, I'm not saying that." Kirby drew a little nearer and laid down his cigar. He liked the way the young man put things. It was good. "And I'm not saying that Nina doesn't. That would be foolish. A duke's a duke, isn't he? And Sumptermead and its history—why, it's something to be connected even by marriage to . . . to those. . . . Indeed, yes, and paid for. Excuse me."

"Oh, that's all right," said Clive. "Money must come into it, however much we want to leave it out."

There was another queer silence broken only by the sharp sound of a horse's hoofs on the hard street without and the mellow note of the clock of St. James's Palace.

"Well," said Kirby, "I guess it isn't all up to me. It's mainly up to Nina. I like you . . . Cheshire, I mean Duke. I beg your pardon——"

"No, please let the first stand. Whatever comes of it we're friends, you know."

"Fine," said Kirby, and then he leaned forward impetuously and laid his big hand on Clive's knee. "Ask the girl, son, and take your chance. I'm ready to let her go to you and damned certain you'll very soon love her. Why, you couldn't help it. She's a good girl, sir, is Nina —any man might be proud to win her, and I don't mind saying it."

He got up, very happy to have brought the matter to a head, and stood smiling and a little emotional, like a big schoolboy.

Clive said: "You're awfully kind. I'll go ahead, then."

"Yes, go ahead. Don't tell her about the other lady— I mean, not necessarily. It might rankle. Just pop the question—and, well, do what we've all had to do. Wait for your chance to kiss and quote a bit of poetry." He shot out a laugh.

"I see," said Clive.

"As to the other end of it, why, I shall see that my daughter goes to you—well, we needn't talk about that. I must get along."

Clive walked with him as far as his hotel. They talked golf.

The following morning, by arrangement, Clive rode in the park with Cornelia. He trotted up to the Coburg

Hotel just as she came out. Mrs. Kirby was with her, looking very spruce and carefully put together, her white hair looking whiter under a smart black hat. She came down the steps and stood on the kerb while her daughter mounted and laid her hand on the glistening neck of Clive's horse. Cornelia, who had been quick to gather that something was in the air from the way her father held her and kissed her forehead, talked rather excitedly —small, domestic talk, which mostly consisted of minute orders to her mother about gloves and scent. And before they rode off together, youth with youth, their horses keen to stretch, Mrs. Kirby touched Clive's arm lightly and whispered something that sounded like "Good luck." A sharp pain contracted Clive's heart and all his spirit went out to Helena. But he controlled himself with a supreme effort and in a sort of way jerked his rudder round to the line of the compass that pointed inexorably to duty.

Not much was said on the way to the park. The *Olympic* was discussed, her size, and altogether ludicrous sumptuousness. New York was mentioned and its cold winter and the fact that Mr. Kirby had sent a cable to his butler at Miami to have the house ready immediately, and to the captain of his yacht *Minnehaha,* telling him to steam round the coast of Florida to an anchorage in Biscayne Bay.

"I'd love you to see the *Minnehaha.* You'd be crazy about her," said Cornelia, "and you'd like Miami. It's so attractive."

And Clive replied: "Your father has very kindly invited me to stay with you there this winter."

She shot a quick look over her shoulder. "Shall you come?"

"It all depends on you," said Clive.

After that they said nothing else.

The park was alive with dancing horses. The sun was

warm and gay. The King and Princess Victoria passed them. They both nodded and smiled at Clive. Cornelia flushed with pleasure and exhilaration. To be an English duchess was somewhat different from being merely one of a number of young high-spirited girls and men whose names were all lumped together in the society columns of the New York papers under the heading of "The Younger Set." . . . Why had father kissed her like that and looked so funny, and why did *he*—meaning Clive—say that it all depended on her? To-morrow they sailed on the *Olympic*.

At the turn Clive made his horse break into an easy trot and began to talk. "Shall you be glad to leave England?" he asked.

"I'm looking forward to cruising and fishing and dancing, but I've had a good time here."

"I'm glad," said Clive. "I'm awfully sorry you're going."

"That's the first nice thing you've ever said to me," and she laughed, showing all her flashing teeth.

Clive thought that she looked brilliantly pretty and strong, and like a young Diana. "Will you marry me, Cornelia?" he asked abruptly. And having got it out almost hoped that she would say "No," and so spare herself from a loveless marriage, and be saved to some square-shouldered, fine, young American of her own mode of life and set.

The girl drew in her breath quickly. This was not the sort of proposal of which she had read and thrilled at in novels. "You're very English," she said, not knowing what else to say.

"Am I? Why?"

"Well, I've always thought I'd like a conservatory, and the scent of gardenias and blinking lights between big palm leaves, and the sound of a band playing a German waltz." She laughed and talked in rather a high

voice, because she was nervous under Clive's steady eyes.

"Are those things essential?"

"No, not essential, but—well, they help, don't they?"

"I don't know," he said. "I've never tried. Well?"

Cornelia laughed again. "Do you wish me to give you an answer right now?"

"Yes, if you will."

"Mayn't I write it? I can write rather well when I string myself up."

"I'd rather you didn't."

"Well, then, yes," she said, "I will," and set her horse into a gallop.

Clive was with her in an instant, and they both rode the length of the Row, reining up where the road cut across from Hyde Park Corner. They were both a little out of breath, and with a sort of mutual agreement walked their horses back again. Clive saw that the girl's eyes were all alight, and that she seemed to look around with an air of proprietorship and with a higher tilt of chin. They kept close to the railing, under the shade of the trees and out of the way of other riders. A group of white-coated Guardsmen were signalling out in the open. The note of a coach-horn was blown across to them from the road by the magazine. The hum of traffic came ceaselessly. Clive caught Cornelia looking at him with a sort of inquiring amusement.

"What is it?" he asked, knowing perfectly well.

"You don't seem—well, altogether stricken with joy, do you? I mean, you don't want anyone to hold you into the saddle."

Clive made a long arm and touched her sleeve with his hand. "Dear kid," he said, "I'm most awfully grateful and glad, and I'll do my level best to make you never regret this and give you the good time you talk so much about."

Her lips trembled a little and the brilliant look went out of her face and left it oddly sweet and childlike and appealing for an instant. "Oh, Clive!" she said. "Clive!"

And then she laughed again, a little ashamed at her sudden surprising emotion. She felt at that moment a great wave of pride go over her. She was almost a duchess. The King would nod to her some day soon. She would be called "Your Grace," and count in the world as a Person, and Clive was a darling, and she was crazy about him and his quiet, different manner, and his square back and small head and straight nose, and the latent strength and authority that lay behind his apparent distrait.

"I almost apologized for calling you Clive like that," she said, and all her teeth flashed again. "Shall we go home, so that you can go on proposing a little?"

"Yes," said Clive, and laughed back at her. She was superbly alive and her sense of humour bubbled like a spring.

In the sitting-room of the Kirby suite, standing among half-packed trunks, they faced each other. He made a step forward and she went into his arms and he kissed her.

"Oh, God!" he said in his heart. "Oh, God!"

II

FATE, with characteristic inhumanity, chose the day during which Helena read the announcement of Clive's engagement to touch her life with his cold finger again.

She had been spared the unexpected appearances of Harwich and his barbed, sharp-tipped remarks for nearly two weeks. He had not been able to leave his bed owing to the startlingly quick development of his disease. She

had not been permitted to see him, and had been wandering about the huge house, alone with her thoughts. She knew about the Kirbys from Clive's daily letters, never discontinued, and in her own to him she had encouraged him—and, oh, the flail that her brave words made for her back—to marry Cornelia, if she would have him. But when she came suddenly upon the paragraph in the paper she fell as though struck on the heart and wept, face down on her bed, until all the blood in her body seemed to have gone out through her eyes. It was one thing to put on the shining armour of renunciation and go through day after day with faith acting as the petrol for her mental and bodily machine, hoping against hope, buoyed up with so great a fervour of love that it did not seem conceivable that happiness was not in dalliance somewhere on its way to her, lagging merely from a spirit of mischief, playing at hide-and-seek simply in order that it might be all the more wonderful when it came. It was quite another when inevitability, against which armour, however apparently invulnerable was useless, thrust its sword between the chinks and found her heart.

For hours she lay in desperate grief and rebellion, all her jealousy churned into a great red, burning, aching mass, all her charged-up passion of wifely and maternal desires urging her to an impotent revolt against the deadly march of things. Not for the first time God seemed very cruel, unfairly cruel, unnecessarily hard and dreadfully un-get-at-able. Not for the first time she lost the gift of prayer, and stood lonely and bitter and maimed among the wreckage of her faith. She was not old or experienced enough to know that every man is convinced, at least once in a lifetime, that his cross is heavier than that of any other man. Hers bore her down. God seemed to have concentrated His anger upon her.

A message from the doctor, telling her that he had felt obliged to telegraph to London in order to get the opinion

and assistance of an eminent specialist, brought her only to a sort of onlooker's interest and pity. This man Harwich—what, after all, was he to her? From the distance, the small, bitter island to which she had withdrawn herself, and there sat alone with nothing round her but the wide circle of cold horizon, this man seemed to be someone of whom she had read or heard, with shuddering. There was a vague, intangible mist between him and her crushed and wounded spirit. She was like someone who comes back to consciousness after an anæsthetic and realizes that the vague, constant hum that she can hear is traffic in the street some distance away. It was all impersonal and didn't seem to apply or to matter. It simply was and always had been.

About six o'clock in the evening she felt her way out of her room, spent, exhausted, and went down the noble staircase slowly, recognizing things with a blank feeling of half-surprise, as though she saw them again after many troubled years. There was a curious hush over everything. She watched a man-servant slip by on the tips of his toes. She went through softly-lighted rooms till she came to the palm-court. In the middle of this strongly-scented place she pulled up suddenly. It seemed to her that here at some time she had been subjected to a form of mental torture that made her hate it. She hurried to a door leading out to the terrace and took in a long breath of relief. It was one of those mistaken November nights that stray away from the departing autumn, like a swallow from its migrating flight. It was gentle and soft and warm, and was watched with surprise and almost reproach by the whole of Nature, which delayed falling into its first sleep, inquiringly. It was one of those beautiful, belated nights in an English climate, which, like a good adjective, can be as startling as an explosion of dynamite.

Helena sat on the balustrade with her shoulders against

the stone legs of a faun and peace stole in little by little upon her jarred and jangled spirit. Her cross seemed to change from heavy wood to mere cardboard out there under the sky, with the world all stretched about her. She was such a tiny unit, a speck so minute upon its great surface. What did her troubles mean against the troubles of all the other units who were, like herself, walking or running or limping, or being carried along the short, uneasy road between birth and death? Nature only remained, and she had her troubles too. Life meant trouble—the bearing of life, the bringing-up of life, the adventure of life. Even dying was trouble. Death came as a reward, a relief, a compensation, a beginning. She was not a child living in a nursery among toys and mimicry and fairy-tales with a nurse whom she could bribe or bully for the things that she wanted. Those days were over, with all their real unreality. She was out now in life, and bribe and bully as she might, there was no nurse to give her the much-desired thing. Not to enjoy but to overcome, was the message of the earth at her feet, if her eyes were honest. A little moment between two eternities—that was life. It was a plant sown on earth to blossom only after death. Let her see that it was watered and cared for, and while she did her own gardening to try and sprinkle a little water on other plants and take what weeds she could away from other roots.

One by one she watched the stars lighted, like candles upon a huge altar. An owl, in one of the out-buildings, whimpered like a child. Soft puffs of air came into her face, like blown rose-leaves. Away in the distance the little eyes of the village seemed all to be looking at her in friendship. Then, presently, a tiny new moon, as slim and graceful and frightened as a young girl caught bathing, was uncovered by a cloud. And into Helena's ears came an evensong sung by all the harmonious voices of

trees and grasses and breeze, giving praise to Almighty God, the Great Gardener, the Father, the Master, the Creator, without whom nothing, even in the apparently overwhelming chaos of the present, could be. It rose up from the earth and came down from the sky and pervaded everything, like a scent, a sweet sudden essence of flowers. And at last Helena got up, with her cheeks wet with good tears, and lifted up her face and hands and cried out in her heart: "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief. Let me lose Clive, my man, my sweetheart; take away all happiness and send me barren through life, but leave me faith. I can't live without that. It's the only thing I have."

At two o'clock in the morning Effie found her lying in her room in front of the dying fire. She was curled up like a child, with one hand under her sweet face and her long lashes making a soft shadow under her tired eyes. She was dressed, because she had been warned by the doctor that the angel of death had laid his hand on Harwich's shoulder and left his marching orders pinned to the pillow, but the emotions through which she had passed that day had worn her out. The whole house was up, waiting, but the only eye that noticed with interest and speculation the unaccustomed lights in so many windows was that of the village policeman, going on his rounds.

Effie touched Helena's shoulder and called two or three times, and when she woke and sat up there was nothing of grief in the maid's voice, only awe.

"The doctor says will your Grace please go to him in the library."

Helena nodded and went out quietly. It was the first time that she had come face to face with death. She, like the other country-bred girl who was almost her only friend, had no other feeling, at that moment, than one

of awe. She had sat Sunday after Sunday beneath her old vicar, and heard of death and its beauty, had listened to the quiet tolling of the bell while playing tennis, and realized that someone was lost to those who loved, and had thought of death as a vague, theoretical possibility very far away. Now it was in the same house, and that seemed rather dreadful, rather fearful.

Dr. Burchell was bending over a book—a novel—skimming it here and there with interest. Helena went so silently into the room that he did not feel her presence for a moment or two. He looked up and pushed the book away. His keen glance detected no grief. He would have been surprised to have found it. At the same time it caught no sign of relief, which, under the circumstances, wouldn't have given him any surprise. He knew something of the peculiarity of this unnatural marriage and had guessed the rest. To-morrow this beautiful young girl would be free.

"Will you come?" he asked.

And Helena said "Yes."

The Duke's bedroom was as curious as himself. It was large and lofty, with three high windows of stained glass. It might easily have been mistaken for an oriental bazaar. The ceiling and floor glittered with mosaic. The walls were partially hung with gold and silver cloth and strange lamps of queer design with coloured glass. Rugs of many softly-blended shades of colour lay here and there, and in one corner there was a golden altar on which there squatted several large ivory figures, malformed or hideous. The bed was flamboyant and enormous, with ebony posts inlaid everywhere with mother-of-pearl, with a peaked canopy of some sort of shimmering stuff. Deeply-cut silver shields, round, with large blunt nipples, hung everywhere, surrounded with trophies of oriental swords whose blades were thick with beautiful designs and pistols whose large butts were in-

laid with gold and silver. A strong aroma of sandalwood and some insidious sweet spice filled the place. The presence of a trained nurse, who stood near the bed, was utterly incongruous, and her normality and cleanness came with something of a shock.

Harwich was lying on his back, his hair very black against the white pillow. The flame of life guttered feebly within him. The look that he gave Helena as she stood over him showed that he was conscious, though unable to speak. There was something of malicious amusement in it.

For an hour the wife, the doctor and the nurse waited silently, the doctor doing what he could from time to time to ease the dying man. In the hearts of all three there was no sympathy and no regret. The passing of this man was unaccompanied. He went dreadfully alone, without grief as a companion, without prayer as a solace, without respect as a reward. He went finally, with a sigh of relief, unmissed, unloved, unwept, like a black cloud across the sun.

When, presently, Helena left the room, it was with a letter in her hand which had been written ten days before by Harwich, and entrusted to the doctor to give to his wife as soon as he was dead.

With this the widow who had never been married except by the Church, which, without question, performs so many marriages that no sane man would permit, and which no enlightened government should tolerate, went back to her room. The touch and sight of this letter distressed and frightened her. It was marked "to be read immediately," and there was something in the writing so like the steel-like ring of the dead man's voice, that she obeyed the direction against her will.

It ran: "Dear Helena, I am writing what I do not suppose I shall be able to say to you. I wish I could. It would give me intense and, I think, quite natural pleasure

to watch the gratitude and appreciation on your face. It is to tell you that I am taking my revenge for your disinclination to fall in with my desires in a way that even you will call delicate and thoughtful. The entailed property goes, of course, with the title to the next-of-kin, and thus the red, big-footed Bellendines come into their own again. My large personal fortune, made by careful speculation, will be divided in equal shares between all the women whose names and addresses I remember who did not share your puritanical views, with the exception of several legacies to servants who have served me well, and to Dr. Burchell, who has had great patience. I am leaving you nothing, not a shilling, because you have never hesitated to show me that your dislike of me is so intense that it would be most distasteful to you to spend my money. Incidentally, this will also save you from the unpleasantness of handing my fortune over to Clive Hurbert and going with it. He, too, I am sure, as a man of honour, will thank me for this. You will, of course, return to your good father and mother, but endeavour, I beg, not to remember that their means of livelihood was provided by me. No doubt you will escape, as soon as you can, from the burden of my name. I hope from the bottom of my heart that the man you marry will be strong. Good-bye, dear Helena."

III

WHEN the train for Southampton moved noiselessly away, Nina leaned far out of the window of her carriage and waved her hand at Clive. Her last words had been: "Don't forget you said in a fortnight, will you?" Essendine had answered for him. "Is it likely? Why not ask him not to forget that he's alive?"

The two men turned with the other people who had

been saying good-bye to friends and relations, and left the station.

"It's supernaturally early for me," said Essendine, "and I've had no breakfast. Have you?"

"No," said Clive. "Beard had it all ready, but I couldn't resist that last exquisite quarter of an hour."

"I know it! How irresistible it used to be at school, eh? Well, if you can spare the time, come home with me and let's have a bite. What do you say?"

"Thanks most awfully!" Clive hailed a taxi and stood back for Sir Edmund. It was raining and the streets were covered with a layer of slush. Depression hung heavy over the city.

Essendine's high spirits were all the more excellent. "My first essay in the doubtful and difficult and generally ungrateful region of match-making has come off well."

Clive swallowed an ironic answer. "Yes, rather," he said simply. "I wonder if I shall be able to make her happy? Do you think so?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know. She's a nice kid, awfully keen and full of life and as cheery as a sparrow. Pretty as a picture, too. But I'm half afraid that her American training will make her find the sleepy life at Sumptermead rather trying. She seems to be as nervous of dullness as a busy professional man is of insomnia. Do you see what I mean? I don't quite know how to put it, but I notice that she's like all the other American women I've met. She seems to want to live with all the electric light turned on in the daytime, and she talks about roughing it if there isn't a full orchestra playing ragtime for breakfast."

Essendine laughed. "I know. The American microbe of noise and sham jollity is a persistent little beast, but you'll soon get it out of her system. They're a marvellously chameleonic race. They very quickly take on

the colour of their surroundings. In a year or two Cornelia will be more insular than an Englishwoman. You must make allowances for the fact, my dear fellow, that the Americans have not yet had time to find themselves. At present they are very much in the rough. They've grown rich too quickly, and they are like children with far too many splendid toys. When they've travelled more widely and generally, and digested their system-made hard-cakes of education, they won't be so afraid that, if they don't put everything they possess in the shop-window, people will think that they have no stock stowed away. You must always give a new people time to grow out of living for their next-door neighbour. They're a splendid, virile, confident race, full of promise, and with a greater future than any in the world. Once let them discover the difference between vulgarity and enjoyment, once let them find their level through a big war which will try all their resources and prove finally to them that there are other birds besides the screaming eagle, and all will be well. By the way, you've not seen my new quarters."

"No. How do you like them?"

"Oh, they're perfectly charming. I can walk to the club in four minutes, and although I'm only a stone's-throw from Piccadilly, and can actually see the flag on the roof of 'Prince's,' once I'm in the whole turmoil of the streets stops as a gramophone record does in the middle of a tune when you lift off the pin. Then, too, so far as I can see at present, all my neighbours are well over sixty, and that gives me a most stimulating sense of youth."

The cab turned into the Albany courtyard and drew up in front of the fine old building which the Duke of York, whose royal residence it was, exchanged with the Duchess of Melbourne for her town house, and which, in course of time, fell into the hands of the Adams

brothers. It is to these two inimitable architects that a series of eminent bachelors, including Addison, owed their quiet quarters between Piccadilly and Vigo Street.

A uniformed porter, with a broad gold band round his tall hat, met them, holding up a gargantuan umbrella. Under this he escorted first Essendine and then Clive up the broad stone steps. The rain was slanting down on the two long strips of garden that ran alongside the covered way which stretched from one end of the place to the other, and branched off at regular intervals to the right and left to the main entrance of every house. Evergreens in tubs shone darkly, and a black cat, sleek and well fed, darted across. Essendine turned into a house on the right labelled *L*, and went up the first flight of echoing stairs to a door on which his name was cut on a gleaming brass plate under the figure four.

A cheery fire was burning in the sitting-room, and two shaded electric lights over the white marble mantelpiece threw a pleasant light on solid, old-fashioned furniture and several full-length oil-paintings of Essendine's people. A small grand piano, in an economically carved, unfumed oak case, stood between two high windows. There were books everywhere, and a nice collection of blue china on a Jacobean dresser. Its whole air was essentially Essendinian.

A discreet man-servant followed them in.

Essendine said: "We will have breakfast, Williams, and if anybody calls, I am not at home. . . . Well, dear lad, how do you like my rabbit-warren?"

"Topping!" said Clive. "You might be a hundred miles away from London. I can't hear a sound."

"Wonderful, isn't it? An oasis in a desert of traffic. But if I must confess, this beautiful silence is broken by the raucous imitation of cats in mortal fight, of waiters drawing champagne corks, and an elderly virgin calling a dilatory maid, more often than I care about. A man

who can keep a parrot should have the good taste to live alone on an island. Opposite there is a pianola, but luckily its terrible correctness does not often disturb me, because its owner goes big-game shooting. May I use the telephone for a moment?"

"Please," said Clive.

"I'm taking some people to the theatre on Friday night, and as they live mostly in the country, I think it wise to ask them to name the play. They might never forgive me if I gave them an evening with Shaw, though, personally, I believe it would do them as much good as a dose of Eno's fruit salt. There's the paper, if you haven't seen it." He went to the telephone. "By the way," he added, "I hear that one of your brother dukes died in the early hours of this morning."

"Oh, really?" said Clive, opening the paper without much interest. "Who?"

"That curious throw-back, Harwich."

Essendine's hand was arrested on its way to the telephone by a cry of "Good God!" from Clive—a cry which might have been wrung from a man beneath the whip of a slave-driver, or a kick in the mouth from the heavy foot of Fate.

Essendine said: "What's the matter?"

And Clive stood very still and white, looking at the wall, and through it and all the way to where Helena stood at Cardinals, free—but not free for him. And then he began to speak, with frightful bitterness, in a low, clear voice.

"I wish to God I were a rotter," he said. "I wish I'd been born without any love of family or any sort of principle. I wish I'd got the power of living on other people's money and borrowing from the Jews. I wish I'd never inherited the sense of duty from my mother and father, and could play hell with conventions and rules. And if I were to be given one big wish, I'd ask to

change places with a man of no family and no name, who had to work like a dog for every crust of bread."

Essendine was astonished and distressed. He went over to Clive, feeling oddly fatherly, and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Tell me," he said.

Clive looked up into the face of this calm, finished man to whom life had given so much so easily. He saw great kindness there and concern. His lips trembled a little, and he couldn't trust himself to answer. Helena was free—but not free for him. Oh, God, what was the meaning of it all?

Williams came in and laid the table. Essendine went to the telephone, and presently was connected with his friends' hotel. It transpired eventually that they were out, so he left a message to ask them to ring him up at four o'clock, without fail.

And then breakfast came and Williams left at a quiet sign from Essendine. The boy was in bad trouble. He must know. He had the right. He had been his father's friend.

"Breakfast, old boy," he said.

Clive sat down mechanically.

"Scrambled eggs and coffee?"

"Thank you," said Clive.

"Williams's imagination never soars higher than eggs, I'm sorry. Toast?"

Clive took a piece.

"Now tell me," said Essendine.

And Clive replied: "The girl who was married to Harwich—sold to Harwich, in return for a large sum paid to her father—belongs to me and has belonged to me—oh, I dunno!—since I can remember anything that counted. And I've always belonged to her. I met her when I was fed up with everything here and was off to wander about and see things first hand and leave George to do his job. I would have taken her with me if she

would have come, but she wouldn't. She went back to Harwich, who was ill. We tried to play up and see things through, but eventually couldn't stand it. I took her away and was just going up to her room when I read of George's death. Then everything was up to me—my job, and you brought the Kirbys into it. On the very morning that we see them off and I am engaged to be married to Cornelia, Helena is made free; and even if I were not engaged to another girl I couldn't marry Helena, for reasons that you know as well as I do. That's why I wished that I were a rotter, because then I should."

He stopped and pushed his plate away.

Essendine drank his coffee, looking at Clive's set face over his cup. "I don't think so," he said quietly.

"Why?"

"Because, my dear Clive, it takes two to marry, and the Duchess of Harwich is obviously not a rotter."

Clive nodded. "Yes, exactly," he said. He carefully buttered a piece of toast that he had no intention of eating.

No sound of the earth's necessary turmoil reached that aloof room. Everything in it was peculiarly in its place. Both men were talking quietly, as though about somebody else's business. But underneath the words of one of them was the same turmoil that the earth went through, with a stinging sense of the injustice of God that the earth never feels, whether thrown up by earthquakes or inundated with the sea.

"It's hard luck," said Essendine.

Clive looked at him rather wistfully. "Don't you think it's anything worse than that?"

"No, my dear lad," he replied, lighting a cigarette, "no worse. You see, you're not thirty yet. You can't be expected, being magnificently normal and really younger than your young years, to have acquired the faculty of looking at life from the proper perspective.

If you had, you would know the horrid secret that each man discovers for himself—that there is no such thing as complete happiness. From that standpoint you would then turn round and look all about you calmly and without bitterness, and measure your hard luck against all the other kinds of hard luck that are inseparable from life. You would say: 'Well, things are all wrong. I've got to marry a girl I don't love for the money she brings, loving another girl. That has happened God knows how many times before and will certainly happen again. But I'm not a hunchback like that poor wretch over there. I'm not doomed to death as a victim of tuberculosis like that poor boy sitting in the sun in a bath-chair. I've not inherited any one of the appalling diseases that ruin the lives and chances of so many of the passers-by. At any rate, I've got health, youth and position, and there isn't any woman's brother or father living whose eyes I fear to meet. I can, knowing now that complete happiness is the one thing life does not bring, turn my hard luck to advantage. The fact that I love one girl and can't have her shall make me all the kinder and better to the girl I don't love. After all, love is not the one essential thing. There are many others equally so. Work, charity, ambition, sympathy—one forgets these—and they are more lasting than love. There is, too, the infinite satisfaction of playing the game, difficult as it is—the more difficult, the greater the satisfaction. My hard luck brings me down to the level of all other men and women. That means that, however else I walk, I shall walk humbly, and being humble, I shall be so grateful for God's mercy that I shall go out of my way to do what I can for those whose luck is harder.'"

He got up and stood with his back to the fire, with the light on his white hair and delicate, refined profile, and in his eyes was the look of one who has had many secret hours of pain and regret. "Believe me, my dear fellow,"

he added, "there isn't one of us—no, not one—who hasn't got a little locked room in his house in which hard luck sits in the easiest chair, a permanent visitor. You can't kick him out or cajole him out. All you can do is to make him your friend. Don't spend your time looking for perfection. It doesn't exist. Look for some sort of contentment, and hang on to that like a limpet."

Clive got up. "Well, I must be getting along. Thanks awfully for breakfast and for . . . for what you've said. . . . But I don't agree with you about love not being the one essential thing. I think it is."

And when he had left those bachelor rooms and put out from the quiet island on which they were built to the sea with its tides and currents and traffic, the white-haired man closed the door and went deliberately through one lonely room after another, looking in vain for the partner who would glorify them. He gave a sharp sigh and a queer, unamused smile. "Of course you don't agree with me about love not being the one essential thing, my poor, dear lad," he said to himself. "It is, and who of all lonely men knows that so well as I? You see, philosophy is nothing but discretion, and in an endeavour to make hard facts more easy to swallow one often disguises them in too thick a coating."

IV

HARLING took the will of the late Oliver Bellendine, Duke of Harwich, very much to heart. Helena, who had been staying with her parents for nearly a fortnight, had been obliged to show them the death-bed letter. But dear old Evelyn, who, since the first illness of his intimate and best friend, had looked forward with characteristic pleasure to branching out a little on the money his daughter would be left, hoped against hope.

He gave out that he did not believe that the letter was any more than a foolish joke. A mere anybody might have the courage and the brutality to treat his wife in such a way, but not a duke. And so, with his glorious Micawberism buoying him up, he waited for the appearance of the will in the equally eager newspapers. When it came, he held forth with such richly embellished eloquence, that he drove his wife and daughter from the breakfast-room, and, presently, the mild and conventional retired service men from the club. It was dirty, he said. Let a man be this, that or the other, but don't let him be dirty. He detested dirtiness. And when, later on, he made a little sum and found that Helena should have come into just short of three hundred thousand pounds, he stumped upstairs to her room and demanded that she should start an action to recover this sum from that scoundrel's collection of cocottes. "Good God!" he cried, "you must give *some* consideration to your poor dear mother and to me. We love you and regard it as a duty, as well as a pleasure, to share our own roof with you, but remember that I am very nearly a poor man, and that, if you had what you have a right to, you would have the inestimable privilege of making things more comfortable for us."

Then it was that the lazy, good natured, untidy, downtrodden wife rose up and spoke her mind for the first time in all her life. Helena listened with held breath, unable to escape or shut her ears, with an icy coldness creeping all over her. And, when finally dear old Evelyn went downstairs, his hand shook as he lighted a cigar and he crept out into the street like a whipped dog. When a worm turns it is extraordinary how great a resemblance it bears to an alligator.

All the same, he gave this matter deep and earnest consideration. The end of it was a really beautiful letter addressed to the new duke, in which, in touching lan-

guage, he urged that something, at any rate, in decency, should be done for his heart-broken, poverty stricken daughter, whose devotion to her stricken husband placed her among the Grace Darlings of this world. His parental appeal was made just the necessary tinge stronger by a carefully worded threat of legal proceedings which would necessarily uncover much undesirable family history—a consummation devoutly to be hoped against.

With quiet triumph and "Don't say that your old father never did anything for you," he handed Helena a letter, received by return of post, sympathizing with the widow and offering to make over to her the sum of a hundred thousand pounds. It was a fine manly letter, simply and honestly written. While Helena read it, dear old Evelyn's quick brain took him on a delightful tour, arranged for no other purpose than to give his dear girl a change of scene. Nice, Cairo and Monte Carlo—especially Monte Carlo—came into it. Once there, he would try an infallible system of which he was the sole patentee and inventor and by which he would very certainly be able to double his daughter's income for a mere thirty-three per cent. of the profits. Jove! How good to hear once more the click of the croupier's rake and the old familiar inspiring words.

Mrs. Harling, who had returned to the worm stage, not a little amazed at her temporary transmigration, couldn't help hoping—she guessed instantly from whom the letter came and something of what it contained; the amount seemed to be stamped in huge letters across her husband's expressive forehead—that Helena would take anything that she could get. Let bygones be bygones, was one of her numerous beliefs. Never cry over spilt milk unless you are quite sure that a certain amount of it cannot be spooned up, was another. She could really see no reason why Helena should not use a tablespoon now, poor dear!

There was something disconcertingly uncompromising about Helena's shoulders when she sat down at the writing-table to reply. With many thanks and apologizing for her father's well-meant interference, she asked to be allowed to refuse the generous offer, and begged that things might be permitted to remain as they were.

She read her little letter aloud, and said: "If you find me in the way at home, Daddy, I'll ask the vicar to give me bread and butter and bed till I can get some work to do."

Having spent his rage and chagrin upon his affectionate wife, Harling immediately performed one of his flamboyant and spectacular somersaults, and hurried round to the club and told everyone who would listen to him that he had just refused to allow his girl to touch a damned penny of that cursed nigger's money, although she had been offered two hundred thousand by the new man. He was naturally a little Falstaffian as to the amount. That was human enough.

Helena was, of course, an object of the greatest interest to the inhabitants of that small town in the Isle of Wight. The will was publicly discussed and was a nine days' wonder. Hundreds of ingenious reasons were invented, hundreds of different motives attributed to the dead duke. Helena was so stared at by inquisitive people, and her movements so carefully reported by the local paper, that she gave up going out until it was dark. In self-protection she invented things to do to keep her mind incessantly occupied. She dared not sit down with her untidy mother and listen to her long and detailed accounts of all her ups and downs with Harling. Clive and his impending departure for America and her own absolute impotence crowded into her mind the very instant she permitted herself to rest. Her false energy found vent in a dozen details of domesticity. She mended her mother's hookless clothes and her father's

neglected socks. She washed the china which Harling, whose eye for such things was unerring, had collected; she made table-covers and doilies in cross-stitch as though her daily bread depended upon them, and spent hours in the pretty little garden at the back of the house getting the flower-beds ready for the spring. Harling watched her with amazement. He was utterly unable to understand the reason for this restless, painful vitality. Mrs. Harling, under whose unshakable *laisser faire* there was a good deal of shrewdness, told herself that Helena was going through a mental crisis of some kind, and wondered lazily, but with very true sympathy, what would be the end of it all. There was a man behind it somewhere. Helena spent hours writing a daily letter which she was careful to post herself every night. Her girl's beauty and youth delighted her, and she told herself that she deserved to be happy next time she married. She invariably used the word "marriage," because, after an anxious search, she failed to discover any Harlingism in Helena's character. So she had no fear.

It was to this peculiar household that Clive came to say good-bye.

V

IT was a dull, depressing day. The sea was heavy and thick and in a gloomy, cross-grained mood. Clive crossed almost alone on the morning boat. He found the town wearing the lifeless, despondent look of all holiday places out of the season. Many of the houses along the front were closed. A few listless seaside cabs waited with no sense of hopefulness for patronage, the drooping horses standing beneath mackintosh rugs. Bath-chairmen dozed in ungainly attitudes inside their superfluous chairs. Two little ragged boys were playing round an empty bandstand, and one or two elderly men went in

or came out of the club-house. They looked like men who, having read the paper, were lost for the remainder of the day—as indeed they were. It seemed to Clive, as he made his way along looking for the Harlings' house —it was named Motemore after dear old Evelyn's family place—that dipsomania must be, with every excuse, the prevailing hobby there.

Clive had written to say that he was coming, and Helena had replied telling him how to find the house. It was impossible to see him anywhere else. At the hotel her presence would invite comment and gossip. She resented being stared at and regarded as a curiosity. It fired her blood and made her angry. And when she saw people nudge each other as she went along she wanted to stop and cry out: "Oh, please, let me go my way! I've never done you any harm. Give me the right to live unmolested and unwatched—little as I want to live at all." Then, too, what was the use of seeing Clive alone? She had his heart, but he belonged to another girl. Almost she wished that he had written his "Good-bye," and was going to sail without seeing her. There could only be the most exquisite and unbearable pain in this last meeting. She yearned, nevertheless, to see him, to feel his strong arms round her and the passion of his lips. She waited, bending over a piece of futile work, in the room in which her father lay stretched out in the most comfortable chair, sleeping a dull hour away, and her mother chuckled frequently over some apparently comic book, with jealousy, despair, the hunger of love, and the wonderful maternal desire to have and to own all in her blood. And mixed in with these was a feeling, a curious, throbbing golden thread of feeling, that perhaps some miracle might happen, even at this last hour, to keep him hers.

Whatever happened, whoever was present, Clive intended to feel Helena's lovely body once more against his

own, to carry the scent of her hair away with him and the fragrance of her lips. He strode to the house with clenched teeth. This girl was his. She belonged to him. They were as much one as branches on the same tree. He had the right to take her lips and feel the beating of her heart. He had never before writhed under the injustice of circumstances with such savage impatience, never so fiercely hated and loathed the chains that bound him to duty.

And it was in a somewhat too warm room, watched curiously by two elderly people who had passed through their troubles, that these young, passionate things, with the inherited medieval autocracy which made even the interference of fate unbearable, churning their blood into a white heat, were obliged to face each other.

Life has a peculiarly ironic knack of setting commonplace scenery on the stage when his victims are to play out their little dramas.

The maid announced "The Duke of Cheshire," and as Helena got to her feet and let her work slip out of her hand, Harling's light sleep was broken and Mrs. Harling's chuckles turned into a little gasp of surprise.

Without looking to see who was in the room, or caring, Clive went straight as an arrow to Helena and took her in his arms and held her, kissing her lips and eyes and hair.

Harling, who had run his hand hastily over his head and fastened up his waistcoat, and his wife, who had placed herself in an attitude of conventional courtesy—hoping that she was securely hooked up—held their breath. The Duke of Cheshire . . . whose engagement to an American heiress they had only recently commented upon . . . and Helena . . . what did it mean?

They were astonished at Helena's utter simplicity when finally she moved away a little and said: "Mother,

let me introduce the Duke of Cheshire. Clive, this is Daddy."

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Harling.

And Clive answered: "Very well, thank you."

Harling was on the *qui vive*. He scented something that might be useful here. He gave one of his old, irresistible smiles. "I wish Helena had told us you were coming—if she knew," he said, holding out a cordial hand. "I might have bribed the weather into a cheerier mood."

"Pretty rotten, isn't it?" said Clive. "But it makes no difference, thanks. I'm going away on Wednesday for some time. I thought I'd come and say good-bye to Helena. I hope I don't disturb you?" He looked at Mrs. Harling, who loomed bigly in the dull light.

"Of course not. So very glad. You'll have some tea?" She rang the bell. Her hand trembled a little. All the room seemed to be thrilling.

"Thanks, if I may." Helena's hand crept into his and he closed his fingers upon it hungrily.

Harling's sharp eyes were at work and his brain going like an engine. "You won't remember," he said blandly, "but I knew you and your brother before you went to Eton. Your father and I were very good friends. I stayed frequently at Sumptermead. How's your mother?"

"Very well, thanks," said Clive, whose throbbing hand sent the blood to Helena's head. "I mean, not very well. She has sciatica abominably."

"Ah, well I know," said Mrs. Harling. "Tea, Ascott, at once. Last year about this time I had an attack that saw me through Christmas. Luckily, we have a very clever doctor here, and, at present"—she touched wood three times—"there has been no return." What part had this young man played in the making of Harwich's will? she wondered, and wished that Helena were not so

secretive. After all, she *was* her mother and had a right to know something at least, and surely she must realize how awkward all this was, though certainly there was no awkwardness on their part—holding hands like that!

Harling's fertile and eager mind was running on characteristic lines. During the last two weeks he had been a little afraid of his beautiful, apparently self-contained daughter. Those daily letters. . . . Harwich's peculiar and nasty letter written from Cardinals before his last attack. . . . Was this yet another romantic story of illicit love? Why not? But . . . well, he would be master of his own house again. What a thousand pities this young fellow had to marry for money. He liked Cardinals, but it would have been so much more pleasant to have had the run of Sumptermead. Dear old place. Fine shooting.

"What is your ship?" asked Helena, trying to keep under control. She knew, but wanted to hear his voice.

"The *Olympic*," said Clive.

And then Harling, who knew nothing whatever about that ship, made several severe criticisms as to the deplorable truckling her owners had made, and would continue to make, to the snobbishness of wealth and managed with much grace and ease to talk tea in. Somehow neither he nor Mrs. Harling had the courage to turn on the lights. With the light from the fire, which threw four bizarre shadows on the walls, they had tea, and while the parents played a well conducted and, under the circumstances, fairly expert game of conversation, returning the ball to each other over a net that seemed momentarily to grow higher and higher, Clive and Helena held hands in almost complete silence. It was, to themselves, an eloquent silence, filled with the agony of parting words, of dreadful regret, and of mutual assurances of everlasting love.

The Harlings made no attempt to leave them together,

because they did not seem to desire it. In this they were right. What was the use? What could they say with mere words? It all had to be. No hand but God's could alter it. Finally, having listened to a rather witty description of the local society, of the difficulty of retaining servants in these changing times, and the effect upon the congregation of the new vicar, who did not hold with many of the tenets of his faith, from Mrs. Harling and a round dozen equally ubiquitous subjects, including, of course, "the worst Government in the whole history of Parliament," from dear old Evelyn, Clive got up.

"If you will forgive me," he said, "I must be getting along. I've only just time to catch the afternoon boat back. Thank you for your great kindness." He shook hands with Mrs. Harling.

"I hope you'll have a pleasant voyage to America," she said, "and a charming stay there."

"And if you run up against a man called Vivian Borastor, who was in my regiment—he's settled in America—remember me to him, please." Like most Englishmen, Harling had never thought it either necessary or dignified to study the map of the United States, and apparently regarded the country as being no bigger than the Isle of Wight. "Good-bye," he added.

"Good-bye," said Clive.

He turned slowly to Helena. With an inarticulate cry she groped her way into his arms and put her face on his shoulder. Her heart seemed to die in her body. All youth and hope and joy fell about her like the timbers of a house under the axes of a gang of breakers. She clung shaking, weeping so desperately that Mrs. Harling began to cry as she put the tea-cups into the tray with purposely clumsy fingers. Harling's desire not to miss anything was overcome by his habitual and deep-rooted wish to be considered a sportsman. He walked to the

window, rubbed the steam away with a fastidious forefinger and looked out at the dismal sky-line.

Clive lifted Helena's face, kissed her lips and neck and breast and hands, and went away. He reached out for his coat and hat, opened the door and stumbled into the street. A few months before he had stood at George's grave-side. There seemed to have been another death.

When the door banged Harling turned from the window. "Now, Helena," he said sternly, "perhaps you will be good enough to explain the meaning of this extraordinary scene. If that young fellow is your lover . . ."

He got no farther. A cry of anger broke from the girl. "Be careful," she cried, "be careful, or you'll drive me to say things that you'll never forget."

She stood blazing, eye to eye with the man who had thrown her to Harwich to save his skin, until a warm hand touched her and a broken voice whispered: "My baby, oh, my baby!" And then she put herself, all crumpled and choking, against her mother's breast and broke her heart.

VI

CLIVE'S first letter home from New York, in which very roughly he described the boredom of liner life in bad weather, and his first impressions "of apparently the most chaotic city in the world," as he put it, found the little mother better in health and hopeful that everything would turn out to be for the best. She had arrived at that unenviable time of life when nothing seems really to matter very much except death, the closeness of which enabled her to see all mundane things through the wrong end of the telescope. They had become very minute and unimportant.

It found Lady Emily, on the contrary, full of uncomfortable thoughts and uneasy speculation. She had been the only person to see Clive off, and the look at the back of his eyes still hurt her, and one small blurted sentence that slipped out before he could stop it followed her about like a cold insistent presence. It was: "I'd a thousand times rather be dead than go through with this damned thing!"

The little grey woman did not know anything more of the ineradicable difficulties of married life than she obtained from shrewd observation. But she knew that marriage, even with everything apparently in its favour —mutual love, mutual health, mutual respect, a sufficiency of money—must be as carefully watched and as expertly steered as a centreboard sailing boat in a high shifting wind. Any one of a dozen small, ordinary, unessential things can, in a moment, jar, upset or unbalance this frailest of crafts. But here was her boy, whom she loved with all the jealous, eager love of a mother, deliberately walking into marriage with a young girl, of whom he knew nothing except what her party manners hid, of foreign birth and up-bringing and ways of thought and speech, loving another woman to the total elimination of her entire sex. It had to be done. There was no getting out of it so far as she could see. But, good Heavens, what was going to be the result of it? What could be the result, in the all too natural order of things?

This question, which came into her brain at first as one to be shrugged away—it must be left to answer itself like so many others—gradually began to nag and worry and pester and irritate and eventually frighten. It refused to be pitched aside and demanded to be tackled. In a sort of way it thrust itself under the nose of the little grey woman and said: "Look at me. You *must* look at me. Twist me round. I have as many facets as

a diamond." And so, against her will, because she was the family's champion through thick and thin, she did look and did twist round, and the facet that held her attention was the one, oddly enough, which held the family and its importance up to ridicule. What, after all, it seemed to ask her, is the preservation and upkeep of a mere title, originally, perhaps, bought, or bestowed upon a man whose wife was a king's mistress, compared with the life's misery of a man and a woman? If things had been sensibly and honestly arranged, the victim of the present circumstances would not be a duke at all, but plain Clive Hurbert. Long ago the title would have been lived out and conferred, if earned, bought or forced, several times again in various generations. What had Clive done, either good or bad, that he should be a duke? Why should he be handicapped, hipped and overwhelmed by an empty title that meant nothing to him and which he detested? It was preposterous, childish, Gilbertian and farcical. No son should be made to suffer either for the sins or the honours of his father. A title should die with the man upon whom it was conferred, and so render it possible for his eldest son to make a name for himself, and be free and unhampered from the utterly unessential necessity of "keeping up a position," when he may have to beg, borrow or steal to do so. These inherited titles were like second and third-hand clothing and were generally misfits. Let each generation create its aristocracy and begin again. Then the problem of what to do with and for the nation's wilfully manufactured parasites would be solved. There never, at any rate, would be such a thing as a younger son—that poor, uncomfortable hanger-on, neither fish, flesh nor good red-herring, for whom it is *infra dig.* to be honest, and no man, good, bad, or indifferent, would be obliged to put a once honoured title into the market.

The Lady Emily Hurbert, daughter of the ninth Duke

of Cheshire, gasped as these democratic ideas elbowed themselves brutally and vulgarly through her mind, jolting and shouldering all her inherited and cherished reverence for family and the title. She hated them as she hated the untidy-headed ranting Socialist who dropped his concentrated poison of unrest and discontent into the vegetable minds of the villagers. If she could have been obeyed she would have raised her finger and said: "Take that creature and hang him to the nearest tree." She would have choked these thoughts and flung them away all limp and sprawling, if they hadn't been too strong and too upstanding to affect. "My God!" she cried inwardly, "why should this title be fed with the soul and heart and body of my blessed boy? Why should he be sacrificed upon the altar of shams and with him flung the sweet young body of this virile American girl? Their Graces the Duke and Duchess of Cheshire open bazaars, lay footling foundation-stones, make inane speeches at county functions, go through the London season side by side, bring children into being—little human beings, each one far more vital to the country than a cathedral—and through it all they are out of sympathy with each other, perhaps hate each other like cat and dog. Is this deed to be permitted? . . ."

And as this last question broke from her, standing a tragic and pathetic figure among a chaos of inherited ideas, the little grey woman felt a new and startling sense of panic. Clive was in America. By that time he had joined the Kirbys in their winter quarters in Florida. Somewhere the girl he loved and longed to serve was sitting free and broken. What in the name of mercy and common-sense could she do to arrest these two lives on the edge of an irretrievable mistake and bring two of them together?

For hours she groped about mentally trying to find an

answer, like a person in a dark room who fumbles about for a box of matches.

Suddenly she found the box, struck a match and saw—Edmund Essendine. . . . Why Edmund Essendine? What could *he* do? That didn't matter. There he seemed to stand, smiling, with his hand stretched out.

"Get your silly mannish hat, Em, my dear," she said, "catch the first possible train to London and beard the lion in his den. This sort of thing isn't allowed to occur for nothing. So many miracles happen to-day that the newspapers no longer regard them as news. This may become a little miracle."

And off she went to her room, like an elderly streak of lightning, calling to a servant as she ran: "Cart at once, for the station."

VII

A NEW YORK banker, who sat next to Clive at the captain's table on board the *Olympic,* recommended the Astor Hotel. He telegraphed this address to Cornelia in Miami before he left the ship, and drove through a mass of deplorable streets, under the pouring rain, dodging trolley cars, avoiding the supports of overhead railways, and being bumped over unbelievable unevennesses, until finally the taxicab switched into Broadway, sending shoots of water to the right and left, and drew up in front of the famous barrack-like hotel in which a man may not only sleep and eat, telephone and telegraph, buy books, magazines, papers and cigars, be barbered and manicured and transact stock business, but, if so inclined, listen to addresses on the drama, new thought, sex hygiene, the next religion, universal peace, and almost any other conceivable and unconceivable subject under the sun from nine o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock at night. It was a little thoughtless and

unkind of the banker to send Clive to this hotel, unless he believed it to be a good idea for him to see the ugliest and noisiest side of New York before he discovered the most attractive and fascinating avenue in the world and the peculiar charm of some of the streets that branch away from it to left and right.

To his intense astonishment and dismay Clive found himself immediately besieged with newspaper reporters. He was in his bath when the first of them, industriously chewing some apparently succulent and endless morsel, leaned his back against the white marble wall, and asked him for his impressions of America. In various stages of dressing he saw in quiet succession one after another of these courteous, but determined, gentlemen, and replied to a rapid fire of questions, among them being: Why he was a duke? What it felt like to be called "Your Grace"? What he thought of the Panama Canal question? Whether he considered the American girl to be prettier than the English girl? Why he hadn't taken a wife from the chorus? Whether Englishmen in the best society padded their shoulders? How much money he was to get with Mr. Kirby's daughter, and whether he was going to be married in England or America? Some of them were accompanied by photographers, to whom he posed. Others by black-and-white artists, who made rapid sketches of him as he stood in his shirt sleeves. Not many minutes before the evening papers appeared with big headlines—one of which informed the American public that he was "A duke without a mole on his character," presumably written by the gentleman who watched him in the bath—a long and excited telegram was handed to him from Cornelia, giving him welcome, and asking him to come to Miami right away, telling him that father and mother were fine and the weather down south perfectly corking.

There was nothing to keep Clive in New York. Even

his curiosity was damped. He felt, too, a sense of painful loneliness in that huge, ungainly city, and a naturally self-conscious feeling that he was generally regarded as a comic person, as though he had two heads or three arms. He knew no one, carried letters of introduction to no one, and was hopelessly unaware of the geography of the place. So he went down in the elevator, wandered aimlessly about the lofty, bepillared hall, with its continually mopped, tessellated floor and heterogeneous crowd, and finally asked one of the booking clerks how and when he could get to Florida. He was immediately referred to a short, big chested man, who wore a peaked cap and moved his great jaws silently and incessantly like a cow. To him he re-explained. When this man had grasped what he was saying, and had looked him all over intently, he took up a railway time-table, ran a blunt finger along a line of figures and grasped a telephone. Clive waited, feeling that he was alone in the hands of a man who owned the magic carpet, and watched a stream of women saying last words after a club meeting on the way out. Some minutes later a hand was laid on his arm and a husky voice said: "Drawing-room Number 7 on midnight train from Pennsylvania Station, changing Jacksonville. What's your name and number?" Clive gave them, humbly and admiringly. This man was undoubtedly a genius. "I'll have the tickets right here in forty-five minutes, charged up. You're welcome."

Clive moved away, laughing. This colossal charivari was in every sense of the word a home from home. He wandered to one of the doors, went through it and stood on the steps and turned his eyes to the left. He saw the sky alive with what appeared to be an electrical illustration of insanity. Horses galloped, hands poured out frothing beer, girls skipped, men played golf, dwarfs rolled their eyes and brushed their teeth, circles moved

against each other, legends chased each other away. What was this? Had he come by mistake to a mad revel in a city of maniacs? The illusion was heightened by the deafening roar in the street, the charging trolley-cars, the hooting motors, the rattling taxicabs, the huge wagons with three uncertain horses stumbling and plunging on the greasy, uneven asphalt; the sudden, wild, uncontrolled rush of a fire-engine with a screaming bell; the hysterical dash of clanging ambulance carts carrying to hospital those unalert people whom chaos and the shaking hand of St. Vitus had clutched by the throat. He was dazed, surprised and a little fascinated. Buildings with their heads stuck into the clouds peered down at him with a thousand eyes. Herds and droves of hurrying people plunged suddenly into dark holes, and came up out of others. There seemed to be a series of free fights on the tails of the trolley-cars, already blown out with passengers. Lights everywhere came and went, changed colour, whirled drunkenly and ran up and down in cascades.

Clive felt like putting his hands over his eyes and crying out for a life-preserver. What he did was to return to his room, pack his things and fasten his trunks and descend once more in the elevator, which fell like a burst balloon, to the dining-room. A Greek boy placed a glass of iced water on his table long before an Irish waiter had time to hand him the menu. And then a Pole deposited a round wafer of butter into a minute saucer, and a stout, bald person in a dinner-jacket, who looked like an Italian banker, gave him good evening, and altered the position of a thin vase of dried flowers. During all this the organ played a ragtime, and Clive looked round to see if he could discover any Americans.

His interest, amusement and surprise turned to admiration when he eventually found himself in what appeared to be a vast Roman cathedral, with the droning,

intoning voice of a minor canon echoing from its marble walls, but which was, in fact, the Pennsylvania Railway Station. He was piloted by a coloured porter, who spoke soothingly to him, and smiled like a host who was entertaining a very distinguished guest hitherto unapproachable. He was conducted to the paper stall, recommended what to buy, left there for a few moments while the porter went to do some magic and complicated thing to his luggage, refound and taken down a flight of iron stairs to the platform of the Southern Railway, and finally left, with the confident assurance that "everything was quite arlright, sah," in an extremely comfortable and civilized little room. Here he was welcomed by a gigantic coon in a blue uniform, who also said "arlright" several times and called him "Colonel" twice. Then he got out a pipe and tobacco and a book, and settled into the enforced condition of inertia and boredom that a long railway journey necessarily produces, out of which he came at Jacksonville thirty-six hours later, with vague impressions of much shaking, much dirt, many queer names on carriage doors, the reiterated recommendation of Carter's Little Liver Pills and Bull Durham Tobacco from the fields, barns and house walls, all along the line, several visits to a dining-car where he had done his best to find something to eat that was not either covered or accompanied with a dreadfully sweet sauce, the loud tongue of an almost incessant bell, and the constant production of his ticket to men who performed neat operations upon it with a very shiny pair of pincers.

He was told that he would have to wait at Jacksonville for four hours, and so, like a man who sets his mind to the duty of blowing up the gates of Delhi or dying in the attempt, he hired a huge and shabby motor-car in the station yard and told the man to drive to the best hotel. All his thoughts were concentrated upon soap, water and a bath. Jacksonville seemed to him to have

been built by amateurs well within a week, almost wholly destroyed by fire shortly after, and now to be in the course of hasty reconstruction in white wood, new tin, papier-mâché and thin slabs of native stone. Imposing bank buildings had been run up first. They looked as though they might fall down again at any moment. There was a sense of cheerful, if feverish, haste about everything and everybody, and one of the most important objects in life seemed to be to make as much sheer unmistakable noise as possible. Everything moved restlessly—motors hurtled about apparently determined on a line of route at any cost, including that of death; light buggies, with tops and two horses with long, flicking tails, were shifted meaninglessly from place to place by negro drivers who wore vulgar, cheap clothes with extraordinary picturesqueness. The hissing, metallic noise of gramophones filled the air, with the shocking smell of cooking fish and gasoline. Palm trees, gone yellow and sad at the tips, stood anæmically on the sandy sidewalks. The best hotel was a large white barn, with black mosquito screens over every window and a long balcony.

Clive never enjoyed a bath so much in his life, or a respectable meal. He took both slowly, being anxious to see as little of Jacksonville as possible, and with a sort of desperate attempt to drug his brain, and keep out of it impotent regret or give himself up to an orgie of self-pity which would make him contemptible in his own eyes, he continued to watch his new surroundings closely, studying types and accents and effects.

When, at last, the train ran out of Jacksonville, he noticed that the whole nature of the country had changed. It had become sub-tropical, with large flat tracts of spongy land, covered sometimes for miles with forests of palm and cocoanut trees, broken into from time to time by small towns grouped round a railway station,

and made up of wooden shacks with verandahs and patches of cultivation. The monotony of outlook and warmth of the atmosphere sent him to sleep to dream of Helena sitting in a small English drawing-room, with her large, star-like eyes full of love and passion, and of Cornelia flipping her fingers and rolling her eyes, and moving her feet and hips to a ragtime with all her teeth gleaming and the joy of life on her pretty face. It was a strange, uneasy sleep, in which the girl he loved and the girl he was going to marry seemed to move together in a queer phantasmagoria, with Sumptermead as a background and misery its constant guest.

When he awoke the sun was going down and all the west was stained and splashed with the richest shade of orange. For a few moments the glory of it blazed and dazzled. Then the colour faded and dulled, and darkness rolled down like a curtain. Clive sat alone and grim in his drawing-room, hoping that this brilliant American girl would come to her senses while he was the guest of her parents and make up her mind to put happiness before ambition. However honestly and eagerly he might try to play husband to her, he could see her going through her years without the one thing that compensates for all its disappointments and grief, worries and heart-aches. She was so young and fine and high-spirited. She was capable of great love, and, because of it, great self-sacrifice. He was not her man. Somewhere her man was waiting as his woman was waiting. What right had she to be drawn into the utter falsity of his position, to be used merely as a convenient means to bolster up a state of things that was doomed already and marked out by the onrush of democracy for demolition? Their son, and inevitably their son's son, must find himself beginning again among the crowd. The pendulum, always swinging, was moving back. England and its old institutions, its old divisions, its old shib-

boleths had had their day. Was it right to ask this girl to strengthen a house, the once indomitable foundations of which were crumbling? Democracy, like the cancer, has no infallible remedy. Once it takes root, no operation, however drastic, can cut it out of a country's constitution.

On the platform of Miami's station, with its barn-like waiting-rooms labelled "white" and "coloured," the tall, fine, manly figure of Madison Kirby stood head and shoulders above a heterogeneous crowd of negro cab-drivers, hotel porters and station assistants. By some curious accident the train was only a little less than an hour late. Clive climbed down and came immediately under the big, welcoming hand of his host.

"Well, son," he said, in his fine hearty way, "how are you?" and took the shirt-case masterfully.

"How are you?" said Clive. "It's most awfully kind of you to meet me."

"Why, no," said Kirby. "I just had to meet you, whether I liked it or not. As it happens, I liked it. You see, Nina wired the address of the house to you. The weather's so nice that we're living on the yacht. So I've come along to take you aboard. Where's your baggage?"

The porter had put Clive's things together. Kirby told his chauffeur to take them to the car, and then took Clive by the elbow and marched him out through a crowd of tall, thin coloured men, whose roughly shaped faces looked as though they had been thumbed out in black clay by some elfish hand and then polished. It was a warm, still night. A full moon made street lamps superfluous, and threw up the whiteness of the road. The car rolled away, bumping over ruts.

"Mrs. Kirby and Nina have turned in and hope you'll forgive them. If you're not all for bed, we might have

something to eat and then take cigars on deck and watch the sun rise. Some sunrise here, I assure you."

"Great notion," said Clive. "I've more or less been asleep the whole of the journey. Are you all well?"

"Fine and dandy! The day after to-morrow, if it's to your liking, we will weigh anchor and fish down to Key West—though we won't put in there, unless you want to say that you've been to the junction for Hades. It's nothing but a jumping-off place. Look! Isn't that nice?"

The car turned abruptly to the right. On one side the Biscayne Bay lay asleep, nursing on her shallow bosom a collection of small yachts whose lights hung like low stars against a sky bespattered with them and whose white bellies gleamed in the silver of the moon. On the other, the tall, queer trunks of the cocoanut palms in the gardens of the hotel held their beplumed heads high above a great hedge of oleanders, with their many-fingered hands hanging limp. A curious sweet scent hung in the warm air.

The car drew up on a quay lined with yachts and house-boats and small sailing craft which swung slightly as the tide rose. A huge, black-hulked tramp steamer lay in the middle of the river, spitting water, waiting to go in. Masts and rigging of other boats higher up were silhouetted against the sky.

Two sailors in white ducks carried the baggage from the car to a launch waiting at the quay-side. Kirby followed Clive in and introduced the captain of the yacht, who was waiting to do him honour. The launch went off with a pit-pit that echoed from half a dozen places, made a slight détour, passing between the winking craft, and then made a direct line for the *Minnehaha.* Before she reached the steps a clear, high-pitched, high-spirited voice ran out suddenly.

"Welcome to our city, Clive!"

And Clive called back: "Hullo, Nina! How are you?"

"Fine! I'm crazy to see you." And there was the gleam of white teeth through a port-hole.

Kirby laughed softly. "Knew she'd stay awake," he said. "Was betting on it."

With a nice touch of naïve formality he gave his hand to Clive as he went on deck. "I'm mighty glad to see you on the *Minnehaha,* Cheshire," he said, and gripped hard and strong.

"Thanks. But not Cheshire to you."

Kirby laughed. "Why—what *do* I call you, anyhow?"

"Clive."

"Right. Come below, Clive, and stoke. I'll introduce you to a cock-tail that will . . ."

They went below and silence settled on the bay again and the night resumed her sleep.

VIII

JUST as the first faint glint of day awoke night with a start Kirby dropped a half-smoked cigar on the deck, and with his whole length stretched in a hammock seat amidship fell quietly asleep. Without making any noise Clive got up, leaned on the rail facing the east, and watched nature pay homage to the returning sun. A flood of amazing yellow stained the whole line of horizon, darkening in some places to a vivid orange and round the sun himself to a rich blood colour. The water caught this gorgeous pageantry and was all suffused. On long, thin slips of sand which stood out here and there naked pelicans and gulls stirred and flapped their wings, and presently rose with curious, childlike cries to begin the work of the day. Suddenly against the golden sky a long, low line of palm-trees stood out on the coast-line, making a straggling procession, and out from the

quays fishing boats shot forth one after another, the gamin of the sea, each one with its quick, pulsing engine awaking separate echoes.

Clive, fascinated at the wonder and beauty of it all, stood spellbound until day had crept quietly into being, and all the colour had faded from the sky, leaving it a transparent blue. The change of light had worked a miracle upon the water. Along the deep, winding channel, marked by straggling posts, each one now forming a temporary resting-place for a preening bird, it was green. In other places there were patches of brown and streaks of blue. Away out through the gap between the low line of coast Clive caught sight of the sea, dancing and alert. Then he turned and ran interested eyes along the sky-line of the land broken here by the huge, flat-roofed hotel with numerous green windows and yellow-washed wooden walls, and there by a tall factory chimney already stuttering smoke, red roofs and white houses and distant quay against which a large steamer lay with black hulk. Everywhere palm-trees spread out their large, limp, many-fingered hands. Over the roof of the hotel a flock of turkey buzzards sailed evilly about waiting to scavenge. And as a flat-bottomed, two-decked ferry-boat gave three shrill whistles and put out carrying a load of negro workmen, four bare-footed sailors came on deck and commenced to mop and clean and polish, one of them singing softly in a throaty baritone about a blue-eyed baby.

Kirby, with an open mouth, slept soundly, one hand dangling, and as Clive lit another cigar and was going to examine the yacht, a tall, broad-shouldered young man, with rather deep-set, grey eyes, a small, blunt nose and a splendidly square, determined jaw came up the hatchway. He wore no hat and his hair was thick and fair and sun-bleached. His face and arms were tanned, and he looked in his white sweater like a young Apollo.

There was something about him—his obvious vitality, his clean, fresh, eager, inarticulate youth—that was vaguely like Cornelia. Clive knew that Kirby had no son. He was obviously a fellow guest, whether a relation or not. He caught Clive's beaming eyes, and his face took on a slightly sulky, antagonistic expression, and he replied to a friendly good-morning rather shortly.

"We've been watching the sun rise," said Clive, wondering what was the matter. "At least I have. Mr. Kirby's asleep. Is Cornelia getting up?"

The boy looked him over with a sort of appraisement, an unwilling appreciation. He showed a naïve and perfectly apparent disappointment. He had hoped to find Clive less a man. "Why, yes," he replied. "I heard her singing in her state-room. Mrs. Kirby's on the move, too. My name's Howard McClintock. I guess you're the Duke of Cheshire."

Clive nodded. "Yes, how are you?" and held out his hand with a smile.

The boy took it. The Englishman's unforced attraction seemed to bother him. "I . . . I have to congratulate you on your engagement," he said, stumbling over the stereotyped phrase.

"Thank you," said Clive. He knew what was the matter. So far, at any rate, as appearances went this was the kind of boy whom Cornelia should marry. In all probability they had much the same tastes. They belonged to the same country and shared its ideas. He took no trouble to hide, in his surprise at being taken unawares by Clive, that he loved the girl. Good Lord! must life necessarily be arranged in a series of complications?

And then Cornelia came bounding up in a short white skirt and a blue silk sweater. Her eyes were dancing, and health seemed to form a halo round her pretty head. She drew up when she saw who was standing with Clive and held out her hand silently.

Clive took it, thanking his stars for McClintock. "Do you always get up as early as this? How splendid you look!" he said, wondering what on earth he was saying.

"I've not slept much all night. I heard you on deck, and thought it too bad of father to keep you up. Wouldn't you like to turn in now?"

"Oh, no, thanks. Your father wanted me to see the sun rise, and I'm awfully glad I did. I've never seen anything like it."

McClintock walked away. Clive watched him with a feeling of complete sympathy.

And then Cornelia went two steps closer and help up her face. It was like a child's—hurt and full of disappointment. "Can you only find sunrises to talk about after all this time?" she asked.

Clive put his hands on her shoulders. "I'm awfully glad to see you, Nina," he said.

"Well, then, why not show it?"

He kissed her, but when she drew back a shadow passed over her face like a little cloud across the sun. A brother would have kissed her like that.

IX

MADISON KIRBY and his wife were people endowed with temperaments so blessedly happy that they saw nothing that was farther away from them than the ends of their noses. The *Minnehaha* was still, to them, one of the finest yachts upon the sea. Every plank of it, every screw, every brushful of paint, its delightful dining-saloon, all its state-rooms so smart and elbow-roomy, its two bath-rooms, its charming little drawing-room on deck, had been built and paid for by the honest sweat of Kirby's brow. His brilliant work and her devotion to him had brought about this big, seaworthy,

spic-and-span little ship—she had the airs and manners of one—of a hundred and forty tons, or thereabouts. It was one of the pleasantest of their rewards for many years' hard, ding-dong work, expert concentration and rigid economy. They enjoyed the exhilaration that she gave them, and the sense of conquest to the very full, in their perfectly simple way. They took it for granted that she was giving, as she moved in her business-like manner along the clear Gulf Stream, almost equal pleasure to their party. The sun was good to feel and see; they anchored and sent out two launches for fishing during the best hours; no worries or troubles had been brought from the shore; a full moon glorified the nights; the table was as admirable as a sound cook could make it with everything that he needed in his galley, and all was well with the world.

Mrs. McClintock, a large, blonde woman who was under the impression that she had reduced life to a science by the application of New Thought, and who talked in capital letters of happiness as though it were a chunk of wet clay to be thumbed into the required shape at will, ranged herself with the Kirbys. So did a pretty little dark girl, whose name was Daisy Holtzapple, with eyes like a thrush's and all her mind set on making verses as an expression of her ebullient love of nature.

Not so Clive and Howard McClintock, both of whom had no eyes for the things under their noses, but were looking at the line of horizon and beyond. And not so Cornelia, who from the moment that she rushed up to meet Clive, having been living with her head in the clouds and her feet dangling above the earth, found herself suddenly upon very much too solid ground, wondering wistfully what had happened and being able to discover no answer.

These three young people were passing through difficult and trying days and would have given a good deal

to get away from the little world that the yacht made, in which every expression of their faces could be seen and where it was necessary to be continually on the watch over themselves. They all had to wear the mask of inscrutability and keep up a pretence of incessant cheeriness and enjoyment, a more or less constant rattle of badinage, led by Madison Kirby who, when conversation flagged, set the gramophone going or played bridge.

As the days went by Clive became more and more convinced that disaster faced Cornelia as his wife and that her life would be warped and distorted as an English duchess. "You might as well put a chamois in a glass case," he told himself. It was plainer than ever that her temperament was all wrong for the rigid, suppressed atmosphere of London society and for the utter quietude of country life; McClintock became more and more savage at the sale of a girl to possess whom he would give his life and all that it was worth; and Cornelia slowly but certainly awoke to the fact that all the romance that she had built up round her marriage to Clive had no real existence. She could find no thrill in his voice when he spoke to her, no sudden spark in his eyes when he turned round to find her at his side. He treated her with a respectfulness that she found irritating, and with a consistent brotherliness that left her cold and on the verge of tears. Examining herself and her own feelings she discovered that what she had persuaded herself in England was love was in reality only excitement. It would be great fun to be a duchess, but the price she must pay for it was her freedom for life. Clive's attractiveness remained, and if he had come on board eager to be with her, jealous when she talked to Howard, all on fire at the touch of her hand, and with kisses that sent the blood spinning through her veins, then she could have remained in her fool's paradise, and even if, in the silent hours, tiny queries worried themselves to be answered she would

have been able to fling them away and say: "He loves me, he needs me, and presently I shall love him and need him."

Poor little girl! Out on the sea, with its inimitable freshness and width and wonder, with its horizon apparently undisturbed by the approach of bad weather, she felt hemmed in by a new and frightening sense of indecision and uncertainty. Her engagement had been announced. In a hundred papers she had been given as many columns as though she had committed murder or was about to be divorced. She had received congratulations from all her friends and piles of letters from people of whom she had never heard, begging, recommending, advising. Her vanity had been fed to repletion. Her father and mother were delighted. Money arrangements, into which she did not enter, had been made. There was no going back. She was to be the Duchess of Cheshire, but . . . but . . . Over the distant horizon boats came sailing one after another all day long, growing bigger and coming nearer and sending out strange calls of warning.

It was Howard McClintock who, in a moment of complete loss of self-control, woke her to another hitherto unrecognized fact and left her trembling before the cold eyes of truth. They were lying anchored about sixty miles from Key West. Clive, Madison Kirby and the Captain were out after king-fish in one of the launches. McClintock was obliged to take a day off because he had cut his hand, and Mrs. Kirby had insisted on doctoring it in the face of a flood of meaningless words from a Christian Science handbook from Howard's really kindly but unfortunate mother. The little poetess had gone with the men, but Cornelia had stayed behind. She felt criss-cross and out of tune, and was only too glad of an opportunity to talk to Mrs. McClintock, out of whose involved beliefs she might obtain some hint of help.

After lunch she took a book on deck, went forward

with an armful of cushions, lay full-stretch in the sun and fell asleep. She woke to find Howard sitting near, looking at her with half-closed eyes, with his muscular, tanned arms, all covered with golden hairs, folded across his chest. She had been friends with this big, determined young fellow for two or three years and his familiar presence, so strong and hitherto so splendidly nebulous, so far as anything of sex was concerned, gave her a sort of comfort.

"Oh, hullo, How!" she said.

"Hullo!" said he.

"Is your hand better?"

He hitched a shoulder impatiently. "It's all right. Nothing to make a fuss about."

"Still, it's robbed you of a day's fishing."

"No, it hasn't. I stayed behind on purpose."

"Did you? Why? Fed up with it?"

"No. I just wanted to have a talk with you."

"How nice of you! Have a cushion." She flung one over.

But he let it lie, and in his eyes a curious look came that was half anger, half contempt. "I never thought that you were a fool, Nina," he said.

"Oh, well, what do you think now?" She laughed and touched his knee with her foot.

He shifted away from it. "I think you're worse than a fool."

The colour flamed into the girl's face and her nostrils dilated angrily. But she laughed again. She was not going to let this man see her disappointment and fright. "It's a free country," she said. "You may think just what you like and nobody cares a whoop."

He leaned forward, looking straight into her eyes. "Oh, yes, that's the right thing to say. Bluff it out! Go about on the balls of your feet and pretend you're happy. You take in the others all right—your father

and mother and the Englishman. But they don't know you as well as I do, and I can see what they can't and wouldn't if they could."

"Howard, the psychic!"

"All right. Scoff! I don't care. I'm just going to tell you one or two things that are on my mind, and then, so far as I'm concerned, you can go to the devil!" His voice became thick and a vein stood out suddenly in his neck.

Cornelia sprang to her feet. "Thank you," she said; "that's all I care to hear." She turned away sharply, blazingly angry.

He was up and after her and had her arm in a vice. "It isn't for you to care. Someone's got to tell you the truth before you've made hell of your life, and as there don't seem to be any honest people about, I'm going to do it."

"Let go!" she cried, and tried to wrench her arm away.

"Stay where you are or I shall hurt you," he said through his teeth.

"You're . . . you're a brute!"

"I know. You need one." He swung her round and held her other arm, and stood above her, breathing hotly, like a horse that had been galloping, and there was a touch of prehistoric passion and masterfulness about the whole of his quivering body. "Like all our girls, you've been spoilt. You aren't awake to life and the meaning of it at all. You're walking through a dream, with only a bell to touch for far more than everything you need or ought to have. You've got so into the habit of wanting at once everything you take a fancy to, and getting your father to buy it for you, that you don't care whether it's useful or not or what you're going to do with it. If you get sick of it you can give it away and look out for something newer and more attractive. What's it matter? Father's got money to burn. But you won't

be able to give away your latest fancy when you've got sick of him. Once having bought him, he's yours for life, good or bad, and you're his, to spoil and use as a prop for his crumbling house."

"Be quiet!" she cried, and struggled wildly.

"I shan't be quiet, and you'd better stand still and take your dose. You're mighty ill and you need it. Are you going to listen?"

"No!" She stood panting and as white as her frock, her young breasts heaving, her eyes black with anger.

"You little fool, you must listen. What do you think you're going to do for the sake of an empty damn-fool title that you'll get sick of before you've strutted about in it for a year? You're going to hand your body and soul and heart over to a man who looks through you when you speak to him, and who wishes to God he could let you go and live his own life. He's all right—that duke fellow. He's a gentleman and a white man, but he no more loves you than you love him. And he wants love as much as you do—nearly. You've never taken the trouble to find out how much you do want it. It won't take you long when you've put yourself right outside the chance of having it. You'll have children born out of love. You'll go through your days empty, like a husk, without one real thing to touch and spend all the goodness of your heart on, and your heart *is* good—too good for shams. Don't go through with it. Wake up and look things in the face. Get out of this glamour of titles and find yourself. Don't trouble about being a duchess. Be a woman and thank your God you've got a man who loves you as I do."

He caught her to him and held her all against his body and kissed her mouth again and again with lips so full of passion that they seemed to burn her. Then he let her go and marched away and went below.

She stood where he left her, leaning back against a

skylight, trembling, with her hands over her face. But all through her veins a great new gladness was rushing, and all about her there seemed to be voices singing loudly.

That—yes, that was how she needed to be kissed!

X

THE *Minnehaha* put into Key West after all. Mr. Kirby found it necessary to send off a telegram to New York on a matter of business. She entered the harbour at sunset and steamed in slowly, saluting several gunboats that lay against the dock and swarmed with men, many of whom were washing themselves in pails. She came to anchor opposite an ugly line of railway and dock, against which the English passenger steamship *Halifax* was lying, just back from Cuba, and within too easy sound of a huge dredging machine which made a noise like the smashing of old iron. The water was dirty. The docks were dirty and dilapidated, and the whole effect of the place, so far as it could be seen from the yacht, was of bankruptcy or bombardment. Heavy smoke from the engine on the waiting train hung pestiferously over the harbour, and the incessant, nerve-racking grinding of the dredger was added to by the constant arrival of small, ill-painted power boats, manned by negroes or Cubans.

Kirby put off in a launch at once, and as Clive was curious to see something of the place, McClintock went too.

It was uncomfortably hot and airless, and a conglomerate smell of fish and onions and cheap cigars pervaded the landing-place, improvised over a shabby schooner, whose deck was covered with dirty clothing and cocoanuts. The dock planks were uneven and full of holes and splits, and everywhere there were untidy heaps of wood

and orange-boxes, barrels and refuse. Groups of Cubans stood aimlessly about, fat, black-haired and oleaginous, smoking the cigars from the Key West tobacco factories on which the whole of that low-lying swampy, miasmic place lives and has its being.

On the way to the post-office Kirby noticed with much pleasure that Clive and Howard had become very good friends. He could see no reason why they shouldn't, as both were uncommonly excellent fellows; but he had been rather disappointed at first to see that they treated each other with a sort of arm's-length politeness, a half-watchful, half-inarticulate suspicion. He put it down to the fact that Howard was untravelled and uncosmopolitan and imagined that Clive might patronize him.

Since his outburst to Cornelia, Howard had felt better. He had got rid of a load that had been very heavy. He also, curiously enough, felt himself warm towards Clive. It was not because he thought that he had undermined the engagement—knowing Cornelia, he believed that his blunt truthfulness would only have the effect of making her set her teeth and go through with it. There was a touch of doggedness in her character that he admired, foolish as, in this instance, he considered it to be. It was because it was now clear to him from close observation that Clive was no common humbug, no cheat, no pretender. He had to marry for money, and Cornelia and her father's wealth had come into his life. There was no false sentiment, however, in his way of treating her. No fulsomeness, no fake—that was his expressive word. His respectfulness was that of a man of breeding and fine instincts, and he liked Clive for it mightily. All the same, he intended to put up a ding-dong, honest, above-board fight for Cornelia, even at this stage of the game, and he knew that on Clive's side, however well and successfully he fought, the weapons would be clean and to regulation.

The three men made no attempt to explore the place and returned to the yacht at once. Never able to keep many days out of touch with his office in New York, Madison Kirby reluctantly turned the *Minnehaha* back to Miami. There would be a large accumulation of mail awaiting him with which he would have to deal. Then, if he were not obliged to run back to New York for a few days, he could put to sea again, weather permitting.

The days on the way back were precisely like the days on the way out. If possible, they were bluer days, with a more radiant sun and a slightly more buoyant and exhilarating sea. They lay to for several hours a day while the boats went out and made up way at night. The only member of the party who had an objection to the vibration of the engines was Mrs. McClintock, who, however, after one sleepless night, put her will into full working order, and was able, as she informed her somewhat sceptical friends, to convince herself that she was lying in a feather bed in a house with deep foundations thousands of miles away from earthquake regions.

Clive, knowing nothing of the little scene that had taken place between Howard and Cornelia, fished and played cards, and fell in with everything that was going. He hid his feelings under a consistent cheeriness, entered into frequent discussions with Mrs. Kirby as to the arrangements for the wedding in New York in the spring, and made up his mind to throw all the heart and soul he had left into making the marriage as successful as he could. Cornelia must be made happy. That was now his job, his duty. She was such a charming girl, with a mind so clean and sweet, a humour so bubbling and irresistible, and spirits so contagious, that the thought of his making her miserable was appalling. It would be like killing a beautiful bird. And so, with all the courage that he had, he allowed himself no pessimism, turned his back

resolutely on regret, and concentrated wholly upon a way to keep Cornelia as she was.

On his part McClintock used every straight effort to follow up his attack upon Cornelia's conscience. It seemed to him that it was her conscience that he had to stir, not her heart, because that was untouched. He watched her closely, a little disturbed because she seemed utterly to have forgotten the hard things that he had said to her, and the kisses that he had forced her to submit to. He would have been filled with hope if she had been just barely civil enough to him to keep the peace. But he had loved her and dreamed about her, and built his castles in the air for and round her for three years. He would have asked her to be his wife before her—to him—fatal visit to Europe, but that he wanted to consolidate his position in his business first. He was not going to let her go if he could help it. But even his anxious and devoted eyes were not sufficiently penetrating to see the workings of Nina's brain and heart behind her ambush of laughter and high spirits. She had apparently forgiven Howard for his primeval treatment, and accepted Clive's straightforward manner as completely to her satisfaction. Her father and mother had never seen her so gay, so boisterous, so restlessly on the qui vive, so full of the joy of life.

It was in her stateroom at night that she lay startlingly awake, trying to make up her mind to a course of action. She was in no dreadful state of depression. No tears swamped her and no sighs disturbed the silence. She lay in her bunk quite still, with eyes wide open, looking, with a sort of amazement and joy, at the truth. No wonder she was amazed. The face of truth was new to her. She had never been brought up to look at it. No wonder she was filled with joy. It was a good face, whose eyes, after a moment, seemed to turn grey, whose hair became very fair and thick and sun-bleached, and

whose arms, tanned and hard, covered with golden hairs, groped their way to her and held her so tight that she could hardly breathe.

At any rate, two things she knew plainly enough. The boy who had been her friend loved her, and by his unexpected brutality of passion and concern had opened the little secret door of her heart to herself and shown her that he alone sat there and ruled. Everything else became dwarfed compared with this—Clive's title, Sumptermead, and the excitement of a high social position. She saw life as it was and as it might be made for the first time. She saw the emptiness and sham and horror of a loveless marriage, the beauty, the reality and the splendid purpose of one in which there was a fine and noble love.

All that there remained for her to do now was to bring her courage up to the point of speaking to Clive. This required all that she could muster, not only because of Clive's feelings—no man cared to be turned down by a girl—but also because of the disappointment of her father and mother, and the surprise of her friends and the gossip of the newspapers.

Every morning she got up saying: "To-day—I will do it to-day." But Clive was so nice to her, and her mother's thoughts were so busy with wedding arrangements, that her heart failed her. At last, when the *Minnehaha* was only one day out of Miami, she strung herself up, waited until dinner was over, and touched Clive on the arm suddenly, as he was sitting aft smoking with her father and Howard.

"I want to speak to you," she said. "Will you slip away in about five minutes? You will find me forward."

"Of course I will," said Clive.

She chose on purpose the place where Howard had held her in his strong arms. She had often been there since, and always the same sense of thrill and exaltation

had come over her, as though something of the man's unbared emotion and almost terrifying genuineness still clung to the spot.

The moon was in the last quarter and the night would have been nearly dark but for the bewildering slush of stars. A steady north-east wind, that came in warm puffs against her face and sent the tendrils of her hair out like streamers round an electric fan, gave the transparent Gulf Stream life and movement. The *Minnehaha* cut through it with a sort of roguish enjoyment and a swing-like rocking. The infinite height and glory of the sky and the dignity and nobility of the night and the rough power of that great stretch of water made truth urgent and right under all circumstances. Meanness, deceit and cowardice were out of place with Nature, who, especially there, at sea, dealt with life and not with the imitation of it as it is made by men and women.

Cornelia heard Clive's quick, light step without nervousness. He and she were now about to deal with facts. He found her standing against the air-shaft of the men's quarters, with the wind fitting her dress tightly to her young, slim body. There was a light in her eyes that he had never seen in them before. They were no longer the fearless, empty eyes of a girl, but those of a woman. He asked himself what had happened and felt glad, he didn't know why.

She ran her hand through his arm and drew him back against the shaft, and they kept silent for some minutes, rather awed beneath the high, mysterious canopy of the lighted sky, rather like two children realizing the wonder and beauty of the world and sensing the calm, kind presence of God.

And finally Cornelia said: "Clive, dear, I want you to be very kind and good to me to-night."

"Dear kid, of course I will! What is it?"

"I've been through a great struggle since you came on

board, and now that I'm out beyond it I feel awfully in need of care, as though I were an invalid. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Nina, very well. Sooner or later we all go through it, and some of us come out very much hit about and hurt. I hope that hasn't happened to you, dear kid?"

"No," she said. "I think I feel alive, really alive, for the first time, and awfully serious because of it. I don't know just how to explain it, so I won't try. I'll only say that a sort of curtain seems to have rolled up, and I'm seeing things so clearly that it makes me blink. Has that ever happened to you?"

"Um! I should jolly well think it has," said Clive.

She ran her arm more closely through his and took his hand. He seemed to her to be very young and in need of sympathy—as young and as much in need of sympathy as she was. It made her feel like a sister.

"Do you like me, Clive?"

"Yes, most awfully," he said.

"But you don't love me, do you? . . . Tell me the truth, because to-night you and I are standing all alone with our future lives sitting like judges in front of us, and if we never tell the truth again we must do it now."

"No, Nina, not yet," he said.

"I'm glad, oh, Clive, I'm glad! I knew you didn't, but I wanted to hear you say so honestly. And you *are* honest, and that's what I wanted. I don't love you, either, and I'm awfully sorry if I misled you."

"You didn't mislead me. I know you don't love me, but when we're married, don't you think that we shall be able to find something that will let us get along awfully well? My one idea in life is to make you happy, Nina. There shall never be anybody else."

"That isn't good enough, dear old boy," she said. "I couldn't bear it. I should have gone through with it

if I hadn't just found out that I love somebody else, and tried to live up to you and all that. As it is, I should be living a lie, and I want you to let me off. Will you, please?"

Clive was very quiet and still for a moment. She heard him give a long sigh and felt his fingers close warmly over hers.

"Yes, dear kid," he said. "You're free, and I wish you luck. He's a splendid chap, and you'll be happy, both of you. My God! how I envy him!"

"Envy him?"

"Yes. He'll marry for love."

She squeezed his arm. "You're . . . you're a darling, Clive!" she said, with a touch of her old exuberance. "A perfect darling, and I want to do something big and fine because of you. You must marry for love, too, you simply must."

He shot out a mirthless laugh. "Apparently the unfortunate devil who has the luck to be a duke gets no more. He's had his share. However, don't bother about me. I shall be all right. And don't worry about telling your people of our . . . of this new idea. I will."

"Oh, no, you won't," she said. "I'll do my dirty work myself. Father will pull my ear and kiss my forehead and blow his nose. I shall have no trouble with him, although he's crazy about you. And mother will cry just enough to wash your ducal crest out of her mind when I tell her that I'm going to follow her example. . . . I'm awfully sorry to be so idiotically happy and silly, Clive dear. Do forgive me! But you seem to understand just how I feel, and you don't think I'm heartless, do you?"

She stood on tiptoe, gave him an emotional little kiss and ran away, like a flower blown in the breeze.

For a long time Clive remained in that place, looking straight in front of him. He was infinitely glad and

thankful. It was not for him, after all, then, to put this young bird into a cage. She was free to make her own nest for the fledglings that would be born in the only right way. He thanked God with all his soul for this. For himself—what did it matter? He didn't count, he and his family and his empty purse, against the killing of a human heart. And as he stood out there in the wind, with all the stars looking down at his lonely figure, which seemed to be bound up in the ropes of an absurd and tragic predicament, something seemed to come to him from out of the illimitable space which left him awfully quiet and comforted, and with a new and amazing hopefulness, as though he had received a message from God.

When he went back the Kirbys and their party had gone below to bed. The steward had tidied up the card-table and put the chairs ship-shape. So Clive went down, and as he passed along to his stateroom he stopped outside McClintock's door and knocked.

"Come in!" sang out Howard.

And Clive obeyed. That big, deep-chested, fair-haired Apollo of a fellow was sitting on the edge of his bunk in his pyjamas, smoking a cigarette thoughtfully.

"Why, hullo!" he said.

"I thought you'd like to know one thing before you turn in," said Clive.

"What's that?"

"Nina isn't going to be wasted on me. . . . Good luck, old man!"

And the little cry that McClintock gave as he sprang up and caught Clive's hand must have gone up to the optimistic angel who does her best to look after lovers.

Two telegrams were brought on board as the *Minnehaha* settled in her berth in Biscayne Bay. One was for Madison Kirby from New York. The other was handed to Clive, and was from the little grey woman in England.

It ran: "Do not go any further with the marriage arrangements. Come home at once. Urgent!"

He had received a message then, out there alone in the dark.

XI

WHEN Lady Emily arrived in London that afternoon she drove straight to the "Albany" in Piccadilly. She was not a superstitious woman. She did not believe that the sight of two crows flying low against the sky meant that there would be no dog in her next litter of puppies, nor could anyone or anything persuade her that having seen a piebald horse, she must keep silent until she saw a white one or run the risk of drawing bad cards at bridge for the rest of the year. She deliberately walked under ladders, left knives crossed, and refused to throw spilt salt over her left shoulder, unless a servant was standing behind her chair to whom she owed a grudge. She was, indeed, a very sane, normal person, quite wonderfully devoid of hysteria. All the same, for reasons that she couldn't explain, she was obsessed with the idea that the figure of Edmund Essendine, which seemed to come into her mind's eye so unexpectedly, "meant something."

She owned to herself, on the way up in the train, that she was strangely excited. It seemed absurd, even pitiful and childish, to suppose that Essendine could do anything to save Clive from a mercenary marriage. Why, he had been the man to introduce Cornelia Kirby. It was, nevertheless, with quick, eager steps that she entered the quiet, dignified "Albany," hurried past the newly-painted pillar-box in the covered way, and turned sharp to the right into the entrance of Edmund's house.

Williams answered the bell. He knew Lady Emily well, and regarded her as a remarkable woman. He

showed that he was delighted to see her by a rare smile. He was a melancholy man.

"How de do, Williams? Is Sir Edmund in?"

"No, my lady, I regret to say he is not."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure, my lady."

"If you've had orders to say that Sir Edmund is not at home, just take in my name. I think that he will see me."

Williams was surprised and pained. "Nothing of the sort, my lady. I am telling you the truth."

It was Lady Emily's turn to be surprised. She had hurried all the way up to London to see Essendine. He *ought* to be at home. "Very well," she said. "I'll go in and wait."

"Then I'm afraid your ladyship will have to wait until the middle of next week."

The little grey woman's natural impatience asserted itself. "What on earth do you mean, man?"

"Sir Edmund is out of town, my lady, until Wednesday next. He is visiting Lord and Lady Fordingbridge in the New Forest until that date."

Dumbfounded and nonplussed, Lady Emily stood irresolutely on the large, well-cleaned mat, gazing blankly at the elderly, smooth-shaven face of the man-servant. It was inconceivable that Essendine was not in London, waiting for her. Why had she come up on the spur of the moment? Why had he appeared to her in the middle of her most painful thoughts? Was she ill or going into senile decay?

There was, at any rate, no good purpose to be served by standing like a dummy on a bachelor mat. She must go home again, feeling extremely small and amazingly disappointed. She said something to the man and turned away. There was only one train back that night, which didn't land her at home until eleven o'clock. It was an

irritating and tiresome thing that crawled into every station. She must, therefore, get some dinner in town. She went to the nearest restaurant, took an evening paper in with her, and had a meal, every separate dish of which nearly choked her. The fare was good enough, but her thoughts seemed to stick in her throat. She cursed herself for having been so feminine as to imagine that because the name of a man came suddenly into her mind he must be seen at once, and appealed to for help in a crisis that did not affect him in any way. "You absurd old fool!" she said, over and over again. "You ridiculous creature, you . . . you woman!"

But when finally, tired out bodily and mentally, she stood once more in the old hall and her eyes fell on a letter addressed to her in Essendine's fine, precise handwriting, she really did very nearly jump out of her skin.

It said: "My dear Em, I want to see you. I want, if I may have it, a long and earnest talk with you. I don't know whether it is owing to my lengthy training in diplomacy, but, as a rule, I hesitate to interfere in other people's affairs. You and Clive can, however, hardly be called other people, can you? because of my intimate and devoted friendship with your brother, God rest his soul. It happens that since Clive confided certain things to me I have been anxiously chewing the cud of reflection, and I may, I think, be able to make a suggestion that will clear the way to his happiness, always supposing that his present matrimonial arrangements are not too deeply rooted to alter. I find it difficult to know how to put it, but there is many a slip twixt the cup and the lip, isn't there? and it may be that little Cornelia Kirby will slip out of the engagement when she finds that Clive cannot be romantic under the circumstances. Thinking it all over carefully, I'm inclined to believe that she is one of those dear young ladies who must have romance, and,

if I am right, I shall like her the better for it. Whatever cynics may say, and these days they say a good deal, I do not think that marriage can be either a lasting or a profitable knot unless romance forms three-fourths of the material of which the rope is made. At any rate, my nights are uneasy, and I go about during the day with the remembrance of a look of pain so deep and haunting in Clive's eyes that I must, I really must, see you at once and discuss my plan. On receipt of this will you be so kind, if you are not set upon this American marriage, to send me a telegram sufficiently urgent to permit me, without discourtesy to my pleasant host, to cut my visit short and catch the first possible train to Sumptermead.

"With love to your dear sister,

"I am, Yours affectionately,

"EDMUND ESSENDINE."

The little grey woman took the letter up to her room. She felt an odd trembling about her heart. This was the man she had loved for so many years—the man that had never been in her life, because of whom she had remained unmarried, and bred dogs and horses instead of bringing up children. How strangely things came out! How involved and yet how childishly simple was the riddle of life. Here they were, these two, both past middle-age, both terribly and painfully alone, brought together in the closest sympathy by the boy who might have been their son, and whose unenviable and unreal position was giving them both as much anxiety as though he were their son. She didn't put down the receipt of this kind and wistful letter to any such thing as the much-scoffed-at long arm of coincidence. She was far too close an observer of life, the ways of Nature, and the ways of God, to hedge behind any such small and foolish cynicism. She was humble enough and wise enough to believe that many things that were unaccountable to the

human mind are done on purpose and not by accident—that they are meant and intended, and that the unseen hand of Almighty God is still often stretched out in kindness at moments when all the earth is darkest, although science, and even religion, have relegated Him to a place among fairy stories. She couldn't begin to understand what Essendjne could do to save her boy who was not her boy. She simply felt that he could do something and thankfully left it at that. Like a mere old-fashioned woman she said her prayers, and like a woman she slipped the letter underneath her pillow and fell off into sleep with wet eyelashes and a smile on her face. The ways of love are always new.

XII

HAVING received the telegram, Essendine hurried to Sumptermead, a little surprised at himself and, as he owned, more than a little pleased.

Since his retirement from active service in a post of immense importance in which he was kept constantly on the qui vive, and from a life very full socially and politically, the irksomeness of having nothing to do and no one to think about except himself had become more and more unbearable. He had had time to make his own acquaintance. He had lived alone and fallen into introspection, and when he looked at himself in the glass with so much—too much—leisure on his hands that energy was absurd, his eyes went below the surface and made an uncomfortable examination of his brain and heart. He metaphorically appointed himself his own accountant and balanced up his life. On the credit side there was great achievement, high honours and good reputation. Also, there were excellent health and, to him, an amazing amount of money. He had been an unextravagant man,

with few calls on his purse, and during his twenty-five years' service one relation after another had gone the way of all flesh, leaving him large legacies. He was rather startled to find that he was a very rich man—out of all proportion rich, with nothing to do with his money except deeds of charity. On the debit side there were, he thanked God, no ugly things, no black stains indelibly marked in by disloyalty to friends, dishonour in his relations with women. There was one entry, however, which altogether outbalanced the other side. He was alone in the world. He had no wife, no children, no big, absorbing, comforting, exquisite love. Regret, regret, regret—these were the recurring words that filled the otherwise entry-less debit side of his life.

It seemed somehow right that, having returned to England to be placed upon the shelf, he should come into touch again with the people who belonged to the place that was, before he left, his second home, and which was kept warm and blessed in his memory by the greatest of his friendships. He returned to find his old friend's son in a position which seemed to him, bit by bit, to be a false, ignominious and horrible one. He himself had introduced Clive to the girl whose money could rehabilitate the Hurbert purse. He knew and admired Kirby, and liked Cornelia, and afterwards had brooded over Clive's confession of his love for Helena. In the natural order of inward argument he passed from the thought that he couldn't shoulder the responsibility for what could only be a most unhappy marriage to one of how it could be avoided. And then, with growing excitement and delight and relief, he saw a way of wiping out some, at any rate, of the regret that stared him in the face when he examined his account with life. And it was with a peculiarly pathetic feeling that he could still do something useful, although he had retired and was so hopelessly alone, that he left the train and went for-

ward, hat in hand, to greet the eager little grey woman who was waiting for him on the platform.

The ironic humour with which fate plays with his puppets was never surely brought out more clearly than in the case of these two people. Here was a man in whose hands the fortunes of his country had often lain, who in moments of severe tension and delicacy between nation and nation had been able by his immobile tact and graceful strength to dispel temper and bring about better feeling. He was now devoting as much care, earnestness and deep consideration to the matter of whether a young man should marry a young woman or not. And here was a woman, born to social power, her blood tinctured with the acid of autocracy, all her ideas and views of life cramped into the small enclosure of her class, standing in middle-age out on the common ground among plain people, owning to herself that the sacrifice of happiness to a mere title was not far short of suicide.

"You're a brick, Edmund," she said, gripping his hand warmly.

Essendine laughed. He was very happy, and therefore in high spirits. He had a great surprise in store for his old friend. "Oddly enough, my dear Em, that word exactly sums me up. I feel like a brick—a brick that will, I hope, be the first one laid in the foundations of an epoch-making love-marriage. High-falutin' language, perhaps, but it suits my mood."

Lady Emily threw a quick, searching glance at the man she loved. What miracle was this, that his very first words should be about the very thing of which she was bursting to speak to him? Dear God, things might be made to come right for Clive yet.

She led the way to the old-fashioned dog-cart, which stood in the station yard. An old man, twisted and bent with rheumatism, was holding the pony's head. A bitter north-east wind came sweeping round the corner of the

old building, cutting like a knife, and twirling the dust up into eddies.

"Turn up your collar and tuck the rug round your knees," she said. "It's a rough day for you soft Londoners."

"That's right. Order me about and see that I don't catch cold. What a mother you would have made, Em!" Instantly he wished that he hadn't said those thoughtless words. A curious choking sound had escaped from the little grey woman's lips that gave him an unexpected and far too intimate peep into her secret heart.

But she covered it with a short laugh and reminded him that she had a famous kennel.

As they drove through the town, with the keen wind in their teeth, Essendine studied the neat, refined, able woman who sat at his side driving like the good coachman that she was. There was something in her expression that morning, he thought, that was oddly young. Was it possible that twenty-seven years and more had passed beneath their feet since those good days when he, with all the world to conquer, had stretched himself full-length at her feet, and wilfully and mischievously treated her as though she were eight instead of eighteen? It was a long time. Many things had changed since then, including themselves, and yet it might have been yesterday when he last sat at her side to be driven up to the old house to spend his Christmas holidays there. It hurt him to catch sight of her grey hair and the little lines round her eyes and mouth. What a fine, fearless, tilted-chinned, young thing she had been in those old days! What a pity she had missed her man in the great jumble of human beings.

He put his hand involuntarily on her arm and said: "I know what it is to be alone, too, my dear."

Lady Emily nodded and set her teeth, and gave the pony a touch of the whip.

Nothing was said on the subject which occupied their thoughts until after luncheon. Essendine had brought with him a note of such optimism, that the meal had been almost like those when George and Clive had sat at the table together. Everyone was infected, even the old butler, who, like a pensioned horse in a lonely meadow, watched life from over a wall. And then, while the mother went off to take her forty winks, the two conspirators—this is how they both felt—went upstairs.

A cheery fire of logs was burning in the little grey woman's capable sitting-room, sending out sharp crackles and a pleasant juicy smell. Through the windows the branches of the old trees stood out nakedly against a dull, wintry sky, bending before the intolerant wind.

"Will it jar your susceptibilities if I smoke a cigarette, Edmund?" she asked.

"God bless you, no," said Essendine. "I've no objection to a woman smoking—so long as she doesn't do it in public. Try one of mine. They're Russian, and rather clean to the palate."

"Thankee, no, I'll stick to my own poison, if it's all the same to you."

Essendine was poking about the room, bending his shoulders over the framed photographs that hung thickly everywhere. He looked like a deer-hound in his clean-cut length and slimness.

"Nice, ain't they?" she said. "To my mind photographs are the best form of diary. *I* took that one of Cornelia Kirby. Curious how strongly her Americanism comes out against the background of the house. Don't y'think so?"

"Fine, young Americanism it is, too," he replied thoughtfully, "symbolic of the growth of a new nation that speaks our language, owes much of its greatness to our blood, and now looks upon England as though she were a little old woman making patch-work quilts."

"Which she isn't," said Lady Emily. "She's unpicking the elaborate work of her grandmother with the mischievous fingers of senility."

Essendine put the photograph down and stood with his back to the fire. "Em," he said, "it's about Cornelia so far as she affects Clive that I've come to talk to you."

Lady Emily nodded. This man seemed to her suddenly to have become the god in the car. And yet what could he do?

"I don't like this marriage. I wish I hadn't brought these two young people together. They are both too full of fine possibilities to be tied up without love. A marriage of convenience is and must be against the best of the laws of Nature and the wishes of God. I say that fearlessly and without shame or self-consciousness, because you, like me, are old-fashioned, and will not accuse me of priggishness or scornfully call me 'pious' because I think that God still has something to do with marriage, as with all other things."

Lady Emily nodded again. She was too excited to trust herself to speak.

Essendine went on: "Now, as I said in my letter, I somehow don't believe that the Kirby girl will go through with this business. I know her rather well, and it seems to me that when she finds out, as she must do, that Clive doesn't love her, all the good things that she has inherited from those sterling parents of hers will come to the top, and she will see in all its naked truth the humiliation of selling herself for the sake of a title. She is a girl of character and imagination, and as such needs love."

The nod came again.

"I don't think, then, that we need go into the matter from any other point of view—I mean, from the point of view that she will hold Clive to his engagement. If she does—and the unexpected has an infernally frequent knack of happening—it will be time enough to have an-

other council of war. Let us assume that Clive will come home unattached and back in the same old position. He will, you think, be obliged immediately to hang out a 'To Let' card on his chest and put himself in the matrimonial market with the other unfortunate title-holders without any money to keep them up. Well, don't think so, my dear. Let me have the inestimable privilege, as an old friend of yours and your brother's, of putting that beastly 'To Let' card into the fire. Let me bring about something that I have missed in my own life—marriage for love and all that it means—the pride of good children, a full and blessed middle-age, and, if it fits in with God's intention, an old age spent hand in hand with a beautiful wife. In so many words, dear Em, prove your friendship to me by letting me put into your hands to give to that boy all the unnecessary money that has long accumulated to my credit, which will be quite enough to enable him to go honestly to the girl he loves and at the same time do his duty by the family. I ask this favour of you, if only out of pity for my empty life, and so that I may feel that the children of Clive's love will gather about my grave when I die and send me into my long rest with a blossom of their tears."

His voice broke and he held out his hand.

His heart trembled, and a high, sweet voice seemed to sing in his ears when he felt the little grey woman's lips pressed against it.

XIII

AND so the cable was sent off to Clive that evening, and the man and woman who had no children waited as anxiously for an answer as though the boy to whom it had been sent was their own. It remained at the Kirbys' house in Miami for several days. During this time the mother was brought into the further anxious

discussions and speculations and plans. Finally the answer came:

"Leave Florida to-night and sail for home on Wednesday on the *Mauretania*. You will have to find another bidder.—CLIVE."

The last sentence, bitter as it was, sent a thrill of relief through the three elderly people—"fairies," as the little grey woman exultantly had it.

Essendine, dreading his empty rooms in the "Albany," stayed on at Sumptermead. The business of transferring the large sum of money from his name to Clive's was being carried out, and the ex-ambassador and the little grey woman enjoyed a sort of Indian summer of youth. They rode together in the morning, frequently reminiscent, pointing out places where they had argued hotly and fiercely about life, death and the great hereafter with all the proper dogmatism of youth. In the afternoon, scorning the after-luncheon nap, they drove about the country, talking about Clive and Helena and love and the rewards of love. And in the evening, joined either by the vicar or some other good player who lived in the neighbourhood, they settled down to bridge.

They were good days for Edmund Essendine and the little grey woman—memorable, mellow days. Having no brothers and sisters in whose houses he could find temporarily the sense of home, without which no normal man can be happy, he lingered on at Sumptermead with a new sense of attachment to people and to place that made his heart gay and his step light. He permitted himself to feel that he stood *in loco parentis* to Clive, and that, therefore, he was no longer merely the affable member of several clubs from which his presence was never missed, should he go away or die, but a man with the responsibility of human life and human happiness and

human beginnings on his hands. And as for Lady Emily, she had not known such complete contentment and restfulness for years. Her blessed boy was safe. By a miracle—she liked to think of it as such—he would now be able to be a man and not a parasite. It was her money, and she was as much a Hurbert as he, that was going to put him above the dreadful necessity of selling himself in the open market. And here, day after day, was Edmund, whom she loved as well as when he and she were boy and girl. Yes, they were good days.

But running through them all, like the thin string on which a row of pearls are strung, was a bold, adventurous, daring and dreadfully unconventional idea—one that kept her awake at night and made her almost afraid to look Essendine in the eyes during the day, in case he should see the tail-end of it in her eye.

There were two things, however, which, after considerable nervous thought, made her determined to tell her idea to Edmund. The first was the fact that he had been so generous as to make her a present of so much money. The second, that he made no bones about hating to return to his London quarters, and let her see, more often than he himself imagined, how sick he was for a home, for a purpose, for an anchorage.

She waited until the watery, pale sun had set one afternoon, and they were sitting together in front of the fire in her room with their shadows cast separately upon the wall. And then pulling herself together with a mighty effort, she spoke—at first lightly and with badinage, but, for all that, with a grim determination.

"Edmund," she said, "I'm going to turn myself into a physician and give you a prescription."

"Very kind of you, Em, I'm sure. Do you think I need a tonic, then?"

"Of course I do. You've been proving it as plain as a pikestaff ever since you came here."

"Have I? How extraordinary! I think you've misread me, my dear. I've not been so felicitously happy for years. I feel precisely like one of those wandering cats that prowl alone around areas, and which has been taken into a warm room, stroked, and made a great fuss over and given a snug place by the fireside."

"Yes, but suppose the people go out of town or give up the house, where's your snug place, then? Take a wife, old man, take a wife."

He laughed a little wistfully. "I feel inclined to quote Kipling, and ask you 'Whose?' . . . My dear Em, what good woman under the sun would marry me? I'm in the sere and yellow. I'm a creature of bachelor ways. Besides, I should never have the pluck to propose at my time of life."

"Oh, hang your time of life! And if you haven't really the pluck to propose, these are bold, bad days, y'know—you may have the luck to find a good woman who'll propose to you."

"A good woman?" He shook his head.

Lady Emily spoke hotly. "Don't shake your head like that. Don't you know yet that nearly all good women do the proposing? Oh, yes, they do. Not perhaps in so many words, but the better they are, the more clearly they give the man to understand that he may go in and win."

"I believe you're right. You have a curious faculty of being right, dear Em. But I'm out of the running. It's too late now."

The little grey woman got up and threw another log on the fire. Her heart was beating like a hammer, but she stood up very straight and put her hands deep into her pockets.

"Edmund," she said, "will you be my husband?"

He stumbled to his feet. "Em, Em!" he cried. "What do you mean?"

"What I say, old man. That and all that it means. *I'm* a good woman, God knows, and I've loved you ever since I was a kid with my hair in a long tail. Yes, I have, and I don't care who hears me say so. The whole blessed village can have its gaping ear to the keyhole, for all I care. Marry me, Edmund, my dear, and don't be lonely any more."

"Em, Em!" he said.

"Let us go to church and then go home together again for the rest of the years that we've got to live. Don't let either of us wander about areas alone any more, like that old cat of yours. We've got no old friends to take us in, you and I, and the young ones will have their own young ones to see to and they won't want us. For God's sake, don't let either of us, because of being afraid to speak, dwindle out the good years that are left with regret sitting opposite to us at our firesides. I love you, dear old man, just as much to-day as ever I did. Do you think you can find a little corner of your heart for me to creep into?"

Edmund put his hands on her shoulders. His voice was none too steady when he spoke. "Dear, dear girl," he said. "I thank you for this. If I hadn't been so poor when I was young, I should have asked you to be my wife then. Many times during the last few days I wished and hoped and drew back, having seen my face in the glass. It was love that made me sense your trouble over Clive and brought me here. You are indeed a good woman. Creep into my heart and fill it all, every bit of it, and let us go the rest of the way hand in hand."

There was only one shadow on the wall after that. These two elderly people had found each other.

XIV

ARTHUR LUXMINSTER had not been very well. Gout, which had bothered him for some years, began to take a rather merciless hold upon him. Being peculiarly English, he did not believe that foreign doctors, who wore comic beards and, as he put it to his anxious wife, "played parts like actors," were able to deal with serious cases. Then, too, he had deep down in his settled beliefs the ineradicable idea that gout was essentially an English disease, inherited from the fine, old, three-bottle days, and so, after a very much too sharp attack, when even the sight of his wife in the doorway made him cry out: "Look out for my foot!" he asked her to leave France and take him to London for the winter. "That fellow Rickards in Wimpole Street," he said, "stood old Sandington on his feet as sound as a ball of brass. I vote I put myself in his hands and see what he can do for me. What do you think, Bunny?"

Without a moment's hesitation, because she knew the exact condition of their bank account, Lady Luxminster thought yes; immediately wrote to a house agent in Sloane Street, to find them a nice flat somewhere in the neighbourhood of Oxford Street, packed up, left the villa in charge of a trustworthy woman, and conducted Arthur over the water to Southampton, and thence to the Langham Hotel, treating him as though he were a naughty boy who, having been punished, is led to a toy-shop and told to choose something that doesn't make a noise. Now, when Bunny Luxminster had something to do, she did it with amazing speed and thoroughness. The consequence was that she and Arthur remained

at the hotel only for three days. Two of these she spent going over flats with the eye of an eagle and the nose of a deer. She inspected thirty-two, each one of which was, according to the agent, quite the most desirable and charming flat in the whole of London, laughably cheap at the price, and finally came upon one in Montague Mansions that, astonishingly enough, suited admirably. The furniture was plain and good. The sun, when there was any, came into the morning-room for breakfast and into the drawing-room for tea, and the spare bedroom was, it seemed to her, calculated to make even an unhappy person cheerful. She intended to ask Helena to stay with her. It filled her with an astonishing assortment of unprintable words to think of that poor girl in the Harlings' house in their one-eyed town, like Patience on a monument smiling at grief and watching her father and mother sleeping away the afternoons in front of the fire.

They had been comfortably settled in these new quarters for several days when Helena joined them, thankful for a change of atmosphere and to get away from the resentful, speculative eyes of her father and her mother's curious but kindly meant questions as to Clive—questions that were thrown out at all times of the day with a round-about ingenuity that filled Helena with almost as much admiration and amusement as irritation and impatience. She needed, too, the shrewd capability and downright common sense of which Lady Luxminster was a past-mistress to help her towards doing something with her useless life.

The first opportunity she had of consulting Bunny was an afternoon when Luxminster had gone off to Arthur's Club for a game of bridge, having solemnly promised to play for easy points, and been uncomfortably pinned into a thick woollen scarf—a thing he detested.

"Dash it all, Bunny," he grumbled, "I haven't got gout in the neck, y'know."

"I don't care two figs about that," said Bunny. "You'll do as I tell you or you won't go."

Left alone Lady Luxminster sat in front of a tea-table, having stoked the fire into a cheerful blaze and put Helena into a comfortable chair, and settled down like a big yellow hen for a long talk.

"And now, honey," she said, "the old man is safely disposed of for an hour or two, get the whole thing off your chest. I've seen something sitting on it from the moment you came here, looking more beautiful than ever. I've got the eyes of an inspector of nuisances, y'know, and nothing escapes me. What's it all about?"

Helena put down her cup and drew nearer. A faint glint of wintry sun had settled on her tawny head and set it all ablaze. "I want you to help me, if you will," she began eagerly.

"Darling girl, I'd rather help you than do anything on earth. You know that."

"You're awfully kind, and the very sight of you does one good. I want you to tell me how I can use my time. I'm absolutely sick of sitting about doing nothing. I ache to get something to do that will keep me so hard at it that I shan't be able to think about myself. I mean work, ding-dong work."

Lady Luxminster nodded, but made an odd grimace. "I understand," she said, "and I think you're right. But, gracious goodness, what in the name of all that's wonderful can the Duchess of Harwich do in the way of work except grind herself to the need of a rest-cure by an incessant round of social functions?"

"Oh, I don't mean that sort of nonsense," said Helena. "For one thing social functions are not for me, because I haven't got the money for clothes. And if I had I wouldn't go near society. I said work, Lady Luxminster,

not play. And as for my name, which isn't really mine, I can drop that and call myself Smith or Jones."

"Or Harling," said Bunny dryly, "though if the work's honest, as of course it will be, that name will be curiously out of place. . . . I beg your pardon, darling. I don't mean a thing. It's only my idiotic old tongue which dearly loves to twist itself into uncalled-for remarks. . . . Work, eh? and you a girl with a face that's alluring enough to upset the discipline of the whole British army! My word! you set me a pretty hard nut to crack, what?"

"Is it a hard nut? Why?"

"Why? My dear baby, what is there, I ask you, that a woman *can* do that's useful, except marry and have babies? Don't run away with the idea that I think women *can't* work, or any rot of that sort. If all the men on earth were to die to-morrow or go fishing, we women could take their places without a moment's hesitation and govern the country, and dispense the laws, with far more sense and a jolly sight more speed than the lords of creation. But, you see, the men won't die, and so many of them prefer being fussy to fishing that women haven't got a blessed look in—unless they go out and heave bricks through male windows or scream at their meetings. Silly games those, which lead to nothing except ridicule and man-handling and put the cause of women right back to the Stone Age. If you don't want to work for a living, you can, of course, go slumming and get as tired as you wish and so dreadfully aware of the hideous tragedies of the poor and needy that your own will become infinitesimal. But, somehow, I don't advise that method of filling your brain. These dear, good slum-ladies, to my way of thinking, only prevent poor souls with more babies than sense from grinding the mangle and washing the floor. They're as much out of place in tenement houses as a pianola stuffed with Chopin in a factory girls' club. In these places they want jolly,

good, comic songs, not classical pieces, and in the slums it isn't the lady that can do any good, but the poor woman from next door who knows how to whack Tommy and wipe little Charlie's nose and roll up her sleeves to peel the taters for the good man's supper. It's eatables and warm water that these people need, not epigrams and Emerson."

"Yes," said Helena, "I know. I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking of something by which I can earn my living. It isn't very . . . very pleasant to be obliged to ask father for pennies when I want to post letters."

Lady Luxminster stamped her excessively high-heeled foot spitefully. "Ye gods," she cried, "lead me to that soapy, insincere creature who invented that silly phrase *de mortuis* something, something. Let nothing unfavourable be said of the dead, indeed! If I live to a toothless ninety-nine and anybody asks me who is the utmost limit among complete scoundrels, I shall say that black man Harwich and give the reasons. Of all the . . ."

Helena interrupted gently but firmly. "Do you think I could be a secretary?" she asked.

"To a man?"

"Yes."

"Of course you could, my dear. To one man after another until you're forty-one or two."

"But why to one after another? Why not to one?"

Lady Luxminster chortled. "Get up and have a look at that face of yours in the glass," she said. "I give you a week and not a day longer in the house of any man, married or single. Ah, but it's no good looking disgusted, honey; it wouldn't be their fault, but yours."

"Mine!"

"Yes, yours. You're far too pretty and young for work that brings you up against men, my poor dear. Nature isn't taken off when men change into their office coats, y'know. No, scratch the secretary idea."

Helena's wistful face fell a little. "Well, then, do you think I could be a nurse?"

"What do you mean? Hospital nurse or nurse-maid?"

Helena replied: "Hospital nurse, if you think I . . ."

"Yes, yes. Plenty of hard work in a hospital, scrubbing floors and cleaning instruments and so forth for several years before you're any use for practical purposes. But I'm afraid the little bonnet and the white apron would only make you more attractive than ever —and doctors and medical students are only men under their skins, y'know."

"Well, then, nurse-maid—how about that?" Helena looked as though she had been beaten with a stick.

"Oh, now you're talking, child. Now there, if you like, is a splendid profession for ladies who really want to make themselves useful and help the world along."

"Do you mean that? You're not joking, are you?"

"Joking!" cried Lady Luxminster. "Certainly not. I'm talking two or three years before my time, of course, but you mark my words. Times are undergoing a somersault. Education, or what is miscalled education, is driving the servant class one peg up. These people with a smattering of knowledge are pouring into offices as typists and clerks, and into shops as servers and show-ladies and into restaurants and tea-places as waitresses. The girl of decent birth who is forced to earn her living is being pushed out by these others, because they take less money, and put up with the sort of treatment that unrefined men hand out to them. They are going helter-skelter into the hospitals, too, as nurses; and, in fact, there is hardly any profession that they haven't invaded. Well then, my dear, what's left to the lady who can't live on the wages or in the environment—that's a good word —that suits this army of other girls? Domestic service. That's the solution. And why not? I know I'd a jolly sight sooner be a nurse-maid in a nice family with sev-

eral dear little children to look after, and a comfortable roof and decent food, and two evenings a week off, than slave from nine till six in a fuggy office, spoiling eyes and nerves with a type-machine on less wages, and live in a cheap boarding-house out of town. But don't imagine that you can look after young children without proper training, because you can't. You've got to know how to feed them and dress them and doctor them in simple ways. I think it would be a fine and noble profession for all these young women who can't get married but have the maternal instinct—to be nurses to other women's babies. And think what it would mean to the babies, honey. No careless and ignorant hands. No illiterate English and frightening talks about boogies. No bribery to be quiet with promises that are never fulfilled. Refinement would rule the nursery and affection, and the girl who had been made to understand during her training that the young mind is more receptive than any other, and more in need of simple truth, and the inspiration that comes of imaginative teaching, could do more to shape and help the younger generation than any other person on earth, except the mother, and she, of course, has her husband to look after and her home, and a thousand things to do that keep her out of the nursery. I know, of course, what most people would say to this idea if they heard it. 'But how could you expect a lady to take her meals in the kitchen with the cook and the housemaid and the boy?' I don't expect her to. She can have her meals in the nursery till the cook and the housemaid are ladies too—as they will be before very long. You see, my dear, the whole of civilization is false. The cities are overcrowded, and as this foolish education undermines the content of the lower orders, and makes them push out of their places, the great middle class overflows and must go—where? It can't go up. It must, therefore, go down. Every year hundreds and hundreds

of young men who, in the good old days, would have entered the army and navy, are going back to the land. Farm hands in Canada and New Zealand—that's what they are, and they're not ashamed of it, either. Very well, the same thing will happen to their sisters, whether they at first are snobs enough to call themselves nursery governesses, lady cooks or lady house-maids. . . . My serious advice to you is to go and learn how to look after children, my love, and having done that, answer a good advertisement for a nurse-maid. Work do you want? You'll get it in a nursery all right. Good work that will take you out of yourself and be a credit to you? You'll get it in a nursery, take my word for it."

There was a moment's silence in that rather over-pretty room. Helena sat with very large eyes, and in them there was a hunger—such a hunger and an aching that the good woman who was her friend could follow the look to where Clive was. And then Bunny switched the talk into a lighter vein.

"It seems not only ludicrous and silly to talk to an English duchess like this, but—well, wicked and criminal, doesn't it? I really do wonder that a rampant lion or the Union Jack doesn't stalk in, arrest me and throw me, neck and crop, into the Tower of London, don't you?"

Helena laughed a little. "No," she said. "There's very little difference between me and the little maid I had at Cardinals."

"There won't be a ha'porth of difference between you and all the rest of us before many years are over, my child. As in all other democracies, we shall soon all stand on the same level—the intelligent with the ignorant, the refined with the vulgar, and then the only thing that will make aristocrats will be money, and being democratic it will be dirty money at that."

Just as Luxminster was leaving the club, a winner

by a small sum and, in consequence, very pleased with himself, Sir Edmund Essendine walked in with so springy and alert a step that even the door-keeper wondered what he had done to himself.

Arthur Luxminster wondered, too, but was not, characteristically, satisfied to leave it at that. He cried out: "Hello, Essendine! been undergoing one of these new-fangled microbe treatments or something?"

"No," said Essendine, laughing. "Why?"

"Why, my dear fellow, you look twenty years younger than you did when I saw you last. How have you managed it?"

A smile of infinite satisfaction came into Edmund's eyes. "I've found the cure for every ill, Arthur," he said. "Congratulate me. I'm going to be married."

Luxminster gave a sort of whoop and held out his little, fat hand. "Good for you," he said. "By Jove! that's great. Only the other night Bunny and I were saying what a pity it was that you hadn't got a wife. When's it coming off?"

"Quite soon. We're waiting for Clive to come home. He gets back the day after to-morrow, and I think we shall go to church on Friday."

Arthur looked interested and puzzled. "Clive? Do you mean young Cheshire?"

"Yes. The lady who is going to honour me is his aunt, Lady Emily Hurbert."

"Is that so? My dear fellow, more and more hearty congratulations. What a small world!" he added, with an irrelevance that was wholly feminine, and with the desire that was also feminine of showing Essendine that he knew something. "Do you know that we've got the Duchess of Harwich stopping with us at this moment?"

Then, after a few more cheery remarks, he trotted off, wrapped up, like a loyal man, in his detested muffler.

He had a nice bit of gossip for Bunny, and he was delighted. It was better than taking home a brace of birds. He would have been more delighted if he had stopped in the club and seen the effect of his remark about Helena upon his old friend Essendine. Left alone, Edmund shot off to the telephone and asked to be connected with Claridge's Hotel, "quickly, please."

In reply to the usual sulky hotel "Hullo!" he said: "Give me Lady Emily Hurbert and say Sir Edmund Essendine."

He waited with the eager smile of a lover.

"Yes, Em darling. No, no, nothing's the matter. No, I've not been run over. I've just rung up to tell you what I think is a very fine idea. My mind is simply saturated in romance, with an enormous R. . . . Yes, I agree with you. It should be. Well, listen. I've just met Luxminster. I told him about you. . . . What? Yes, of course, I'm telling everybody. I simply can't keep it to myself. *Do* listen, darling. It's really very important. In the course of conversation he told me that Clive's girl is staying with his wife in their flat in Montague Mansions. Yes . . . yes . . . yes. You've got it. We'll go and call there to-morrow—they're very old friends of mine, and of course I ought to introduce them to my future wife, and in that way see the girl for ourselves. . . . Yes . . . yes. Amazing how we think alike! Call for her on our way to meet Clive, merely asking her to come for a drive, and let her be with us on the platform when his train comes in. Dear lad! how delighted he will be. And you and I will really feel like good fairies, eh? Yes, it *is* good. . . . Don't say good-bye. I hate the word. I've just called here for letters on my way to the 'Albany' to change. I shall be with you for dinner at seven-thirty sharp. The play begins at a quarter to nine. We'll cut the first piece. *Au revoir,* darling. . . . Oh, bless you, I don't care if the

telephone girl *is* listening. This is love, and I hope she has the luck to find it too. . . ."

The following afternoon at half-past four two elderly young people stood outside the door of the Luxminster flat. Lady Emily was dressed like a woman for the first time for many years. Essendine, with the recklessness of the man in love, snatched a kiss. The door opened before the little grey woman could protest indignantly and hold up her face for more. Of course, Lady Luxminster was in, because Essendine was a diplomatist.

Bunny was excited and nervous and strung up. With that marvellous intuition that God gave to women as some sort of compensation for having endowed men with all the other advantages, she saw far more in this apparently pleasant visit than met the eye. Helena was the reason. Something was going to happen to her dear girl.

She went forward flamboyantly, with far too much powder on her excellent face and with her dreadfully yellow head flaming. "Well, I *am* glad, Edmund, old man," she said. "It would have been a crying shame if you'd gone on being a bachelor."

Essendine beamed—he was gorgeously happy—and introduced Lady Emily. The two women took each other's measure in a flick of an eyelid and shook hands warmly. There were some emotional, laughing words spoken by them and by Arthur and Edmund—all at once. It was like a merry monkey-house, and all the while Helena, like a lovely young flower, stood watching and listening, an aloof but sympathetic figure.

And then she was brought into the group, and as the little grey woman and Edmund caught sight of her they both held their breath, and the same thought flashed through their minds. "No wonder Clive loves this girl—no wonder. Thank God that we are able to bring them together."

It added to Bunny's excitement to see the motherly way in which Lady Emily took possession of Helena and sat by her side and patted her hand. Something *must* be going to happen! It was in the air. It was in the eyes of the two elderly lovers. Even Arthur seemed to feel it because he was behaving like a man who has had just one glass of champagne too much. His tongue was running away with him.

The only young person in that merry, oddly nervous group of more than middle-aged people who was not young and agog with a sense of impending happiness was Helena. She was glad and not glad to meet Clive's aunt, of whom she had heard so much from him. It opened up the old wound in the most painful manner and made her heart bleed again. Finally it was not she who accepted the invitation to drive in the morning with Essendine and the little grey woman, but Bunny on her behalf.

"Of course she will go. I should think so, indeed. Do her good. And she needs a bit of goodness, the darling thing, more than anybody I know."

And when the lovers had gone, and Helena was bending over a book quite unable to see a single word of print, Bunny beckoned to Arthur and went to her bedroom. Arthur followed quickly. Hang the gouty foot!

"Shut the door, cockie," whispered Bunny. "Now come here. I've got it. Yes, I've got it."

"Got what, old girl?"

"To the bottom of all this. Didn't you tell me that Clive comes home to-morrow?"

"Yes. . . . Well?"

"Those two old darlings have done something. They've found the luck-penny. They're going to take my little girl to meet that boy. It's all coming right, Arthur, it's all coming right, old man. I feel it in my bones. Those two are coming together, after all. Somebody's worked

a miracle for the sake of their great love—yes, a miracle!"

The little red-faced, robin-shaped man remained silent for a moment, and then all he said was "Somebody, Bunny?" in a tone so quiet and curious that his wife turned round and eyed him sharply.

"I said somebody, Arthur, but . . . I see what you mean. I ought not to have said somebody; but, good Lord, one forgets, even when one's happy, doesn't one? God's still in His Heaven, and for all our scepticism and carelessness He *does* bring things right for His children when they've played the game."

The car turned out of the park in which winter had laid her hand upon the trees.

It was a clear, cold morning, with a glint of sun and an exhilarating south-east wind. People moved briskly. Pieces of paper were caught up and turned into tailless kites. Horses' hoofs rang sharply on the hard, dry roads. Ubiquitous taxicabs shot in and out of the traffic with added energy and minnow-like cunning. Shops were full of Christmas presents.

The little grey woman threw a sudden wink at Edmund and gave him a little kick.

He took his cue at once. "Oh, by the way," he said casually—it was excellently well done even for a diplomatist—"would you two ladies allow me to tell the man to drive to Waterloo?"

"Waterloo? A horrid place!" grumbled Lady Emily. "My dear Edmund, why?"

"Well, I have a little matter of business to do in the station—or rather a little matter of pleasure. I want to meet a friend of mine and have a few words with him; but if you'd rather not go that way . . ."

Lady Emily turned to Helena. "What do you say, my dear?"

"Oh, please. I don't mind a bit, really." Helena was thinking deeply over all that Bunny Luxminster had said about useful work. This unexpected visit to London must be turned to advantage. To face those sham-busy days in the Isle of Wight house again, to sit and listen to the elaborate misrepresentations of facts by her father and watch the lazy acceptance of them by her poor dear mother, was more than she could bear. Work was the only way out for her. What else was there? Both she and Clive, oddly enough, were suffering from the infliction of false class, an inherited disease.

"Well, then, tell the man, Edmund . . . Waterloo—of all places. I like your idea of a pleasant drive!"

And then she and Essendine exchanged looks. They were so excited that they could hardly talk, and so unlike their old childish idea of good fairies that they had all they could do to prevent a gust of laughter.

They crossed Westminster Bridge, glancing anxiously at Big Ben. They were cutting it close on purpose. The thick, muddy water of the river was running out to the sea. It was symbolic. With the turn of the tide was coming a new phase of life for Clive and Helena.

The station was like a huge bee-hive. Trains came in, emptying out their loads of people acutely intent on the business or pleasure that brought them to the City, and went out, carrying with them other loads just as one-eyed and self-occupied. Round the book-stalls, in long lines up to the booking-offices, in and out of the restaurants there were men and women and children, of all classes, all creeds, several nationalities, and in the heart of each one there was a little world. Each one found life different, and to each one fate seemed to be a personal task-master. There was not one soul in all that moving, shifting crowd of human creatures whose story would not have filled a book. And there, passing through them,

unnoticed, unwatched, without awakening an instant's interest, were Helena, the little grey woman and Edmund Essendine.

And then Clive's train came slowly and pantingly in, and gave out a new crowd, and there he stood, tall and young and full of fine possibilities, of just as little interest, with all his heart-aches and little troubles, as the rest of them. Who knew or cared what these four were undergoing or why they were there? How could they know or care—life had them all in the same grip, recognizing no class distinction, no money differences, treating all with the same hardness, the same apparent cruelty.

Lady Emily kept Helena talking, with her back to the train. Essendine hurried forward, with outstretched hand.

"Clive, my dear lad!"

The word froze on Clive's lips. He had seen Helena. He broke away from Essendine.

"Why has Helena been brought here?" he demanded angrily.

She wheeled round and gave a cry. She, too, was angry. What use was there in seeing Clive again with all life between them? It was a piece of the most wanton cruelty.

So it had seemed to Clive. "Aunt Em, Sir Edmund—you two, of all people. . . ."

The little grey woman caught hold of his arm. Her eyes were full of tears. "Listen, Clivey," she said, "and you, Helena, my dear. And then you'll know exactly what all this means. . . . You've neither of you run straight for nothing. You may have thought, and I can't blame you, that no good purpose is served in being good and not giving way. There you're wrong. . . . You've brought about the utterly unexpected, and your reward is in having each other. I've had a present of money from the man whose wife I'm going to be that I've put

into the family. There's no longer any need for you to sell yourself. You're your own master."

Clive bent forward. "Is that true?"

"As true as life," said Essendine.

"As true as death," said the little grey woman.

Clive turned, gave a hungry cry, caught Helena into his arms, and in the midst of the unseeing crowd, whose pain and grief and joy and regret and all the other urgent necessities had them in hand, held her against his heart and kissed her soul.

XV

THE little mother was up and about earlier than usual the following morning. A telegram from her sister had arrived during the previous afternoon that had made it almost impossible for her to get a single wink of sleep. It had said: "We are all coming down by the ten-twenty to-morrow. Fly the old flag from the tower, dear heart, our luck has come back again.—EM."

She and the housekeeper had made a search for the flag that had been put away the day after George's wedding, and the old butler had taken it up the winding, narrow stairway of the tower in which Clive's rooms were and hauled it excitedly to the top of the pole. And as he stood, with his rheumatic hands clasped together, and watched it go out in the sharp December breeze, he said to himself: "Lady Emily says that our luck has come back again. God be thanked for that! God be thanked!"

Out on the terrace below the Dowager Duchess of Cheshire, whose life had been as full of grief and tragedy as that of many of the old women who sat huddled up in front of the fire in their cottages in the village, saw through blinding tears the worn-old, almost colourless flag waving bravely.

She knew what Edmund had done for Emily and what Emily had done for Clive, and thus for the family; but of Helena she knew nothing. There had been an unplanned, instinctive conspiracy to spare her from the knowledge of Clive's unhappiness. So a hundred timid questions ran through her brain—timid because since George's death in such a way she was afraid of life and its sudden cruelty. But the fact remained that Emily would never have sent a telegram so brimming over with joy and gladness if something very good had not happened since she and Edmund had gone to London. And it obviously concerned Clive.

Poor little mother! Only one of her boys had been left to her. Her great, big, hearty, red-headed George had been taken away. He wouldn't have to wait very long now before he came to meet her on the other side, before she felt his strong arms again, and heard once more the little loving word that she had first taught him to say. But Clive was here—Clive who was responsible to every stone and tree of the old place, to his brother and father and father's fathers for the future of the family. And he was home again, and his marriage to the bright young American girl had been broken off. What, then, did Emily mean by saying that luck had come back? Luck? There had been no such thing in that old house for so many years. But when Emily said a thing she meant it, and the little mother was finally content to wait and see what she meant.

It seemed to her as she moved about the place that cheerful morning that the fairies had paid it a visit during the night. Their little deft fingers had be-laced every minute thing on the earth with silver frost and drawn, with infinite care and cunning, strange ferns and fans upon the window panes. The first touch of morning had sent them helter-skelter, but in a wistful, indefinable way something of their goodness lingered behind, like a scent.

It had the effect of making everyone in and around the old house kinder and more cheerful and less selfish and keenlier awake to the exquisite beauty of life and nature and God. It was as though all the little children who had been born dead or died early had come down in a body on a special visit to this place because its people were good and clean and had done their best, and had been in trouble and needed comfort, and that the wishes of the little visitors had been caught by the frost and left behind on grass and branches and plants.

How else, then, should the little mother have gone about, putting flowers from the glass-houses in the hall to welcome her remaining boy home again, but with a sense of unexplainable emotion that made her heart swim and her old eyes wet?

So great was her confidence in Emily that she felt the load of her last anxiety slip from her shoulders. Luck had come back again. She said so. That could only mean that something good had come to Clive. And if something good had come to Clive she could stand aside and wait peacefully for her summons. She would be glad when the messenger came. He would be welcome. Her heart was full of home-sickness. She ached to go to the man who had loved her so well and whom she had missed so badly. With him was home.

And so, when she had made everything cheerful below, she went slowly up to her room and shut herself in, and stood, with the clear, bright light upon her white hair and faithful eyes, and put the last photograph of her husband to her lips and heart, and laid tender hands upon some of the toys that George had played with when he was a baby. Dear little old mother, her day nearly done, every single hour of her life a tiny jewel in the crown of Almighty God, she stood there symbolic of all motherhood and wifehood, only one of innumerable other elderly women who had done well, borne grief and pain

with courage and added to her faith. And like all her sister Madonnas, her heart and hands and thoughts went back to her man, and her boy first born of him, and forward to the good hour when she should meet them again. In that meeting she believed with all the strength of her soul, because she was a mother, because she had been blessed with the divine gift of motherhood and had not forgotten. Faith is the heroism of intellect. It is taking God at His word. It is not the beginning but the end of all knowledge.

And so dreaming away the hour that brought her little family back, she did not hear the carriage drive up, or the little grey woman's ringing voice on the terrace, or see Edmund's face alight with something that touched it with nobility, or hear Clive's words to Helena as he led her into his house that was going to be hers, and put his arms round her and his heart upon her lips.

She sat with a smile on her mouth, her hands resting on a little boat that lay in her lap, and looked up suddenly, with a start, to see Clive come into her room, holding the hand of a beautiful girl with tawny hair and great grey eyes. And before she could get up Clive was on his knees at her side, with his head on her shoulder. With her arms about him she held him there, very tight, very warmly, with love like a halo round her head.

After a while, strangely comforted, Clive got up and put Helena in his place. It was right that she should kneel for this woman was a mother. She had done and been what the girl hoped to do and be. It was her work, her mission. She loved her man and would bear his children.

And the little mother looked into the young face with her hands on her shoulders. "Who are you, my dear?" she asked.

And before Clive could answer, Helena spoke. "I'm

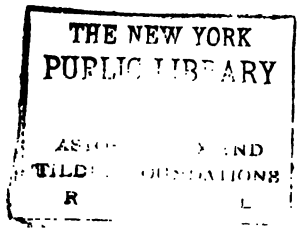
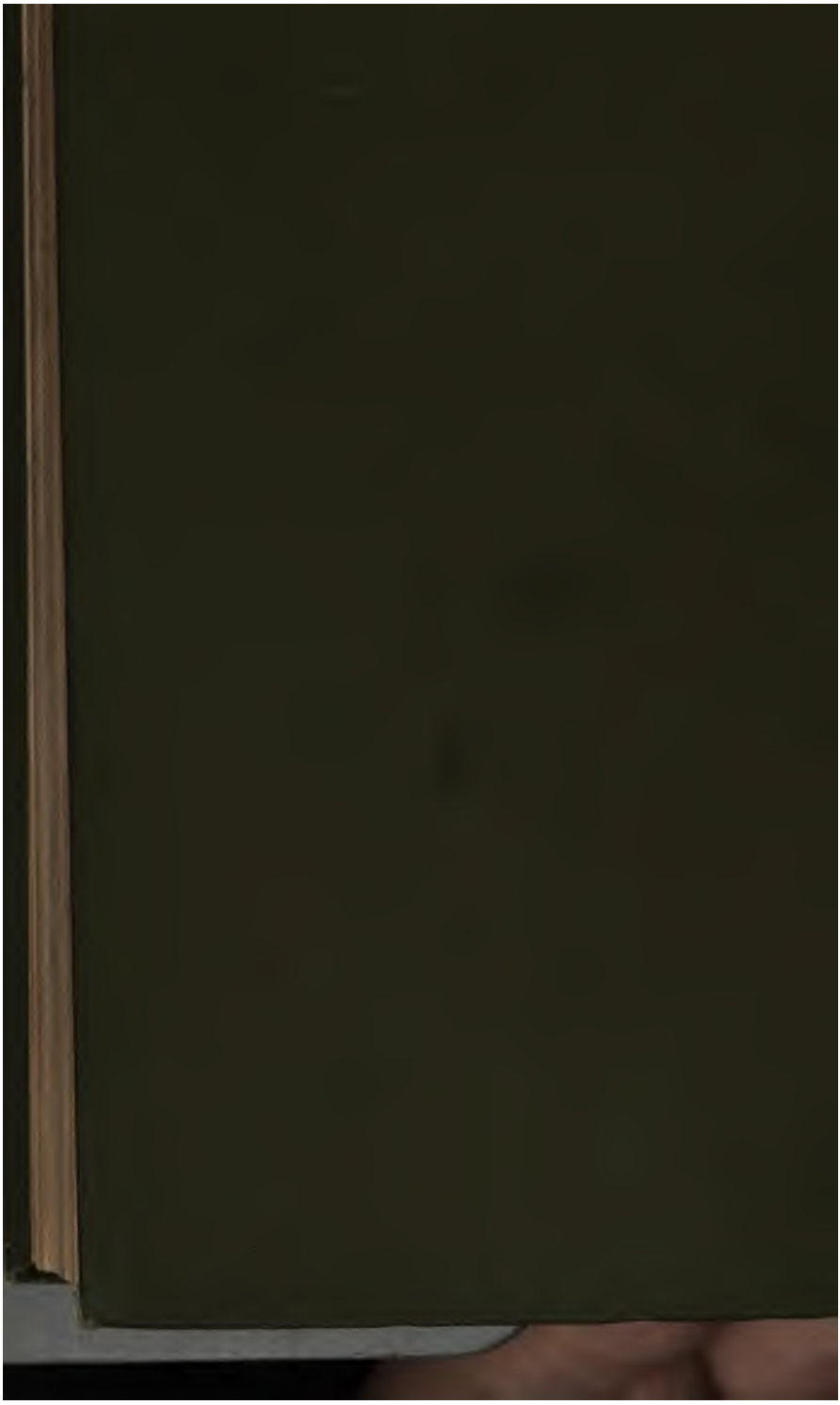
Clive's girl," she said. "I've loved and waited for him ever since I can remember, as he has loved and waited for me, and I'm going to be his wife, mother."

The little old lady bent forward, looked searchingly into the young, frank, thankful eyes and took her into her arms.

"I'm satisfied, my dear," she said. "Luck *has* come back again. God bless you and my boy and bring new life to this old house."

And when the little grey woman peeped into the room, she closed the door upon the group, the sight of which flooded her eyes, and went downstairs to the other elderly young fairy.

THE END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